Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

AUGUST

86

RPGA® NETWORK

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The Third Degree

Dreams Are Made Of This

From the Gaming Casebook of Inspector Jeff Cisneros

I was in a particularly black mood when my secretary Angie slid her way into my sanctuary and said, "Your friend Griff is here." Uttering a curse usually saved for bad hangovers, I fired up another Lucky and snapped, "Send him in." He strode into my office like a panther. "Just got off an interesting project, JC," he declared. "Harmony is up to his old tricks." Noting the small disk in his hand, I asked "All right, Griff, what's up? You usually don't come calling, unless it's to collect a marker I owe you."

Smoothly considering my question and noting my condition, he replied, "OK, JC. I have a good one for you." He handed me the disk and explained about the security problem Harmony and his project was causing. "Look it over, JC, and tell me what you think." I plunked the disk into my computer and prepared myself for trouble. Griff started laughing and I knew I had been had. "Enjoy it, JC, Harmony sends his compliments." He leaned back in his chair, flashed a rare grin and settled in to watch as I gave a weak smile and delved deeply into:

Dream Park

I had high expectations for this product. Thankfully I was not terribly disappointed. I freely admit I am fascinated by the genre created by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes. Yet I would be remiss in my job if I did not give this product a thorough grilling.

Dream Park is a remarkably well thought out project from its inception to completion, and the quality shows in the game manual. The artwork is sharp, crisp, and futuristic. The layout is easy to understand and uses frequent illustrations to help the reader visualize what the author is describing. It doesn't stop there. The author uses lay terms to describe technical concepts without losing anything in the translation.

For those of you who have not read the Dream Park novels, the setting is in California in the middle of the next century (approximately 2050 AD). Dream Park is best described as a highly advanced Disney World, featuring ordinary attractions, large theme hotels, shopping, and all the things you'd expect to find in a theme park. There the comparison stops, for in the park are two huge virtual reality theaters called Gaming Areas. Within these theaters, gamers from around the world and solar system participate in live role-playing games. This is the basic setting for the game.

Introduction

The first thing that grabbed my attention is the in-character introduction to the product by the main character of the novels. Alex Griffin, the Chief of Security for Dream Park, takes you on a guided tour of the park. Other main characters from the novels further explain the functions of the park and the concepts of gaming in the gaming areas. This explanation is done very well and will immediately grab most readers' attention. Griffin winds up his tour with an introduction by Niven, Barnes, and the game's designer Mike Pondsmith. Mr. Pondsmith briefly explains what the system is all about, and introduces a new concept to role-playing, the Quik Start system.

Quik Start

This new system is for novice and first-time gamers. The system is composed of Character Cards with pregenerated characters, some easy to understand rules, and your imagination. To play, you select a card and get a couple of six-siders and a paper clip. Then you select one of the adventures provided in the book, and you're ready to play. The rules are quite basic and easy to grasp in the first read. This is the simplest system for a novice role player I have seen since Victory Games's James Bond 007 Basic rules. It took me fifteen minutes to read and understand this section. I played a simple Quik Start game with a friend in about an hour. It was great fun, and all that was missing was the soda and chips. The designer provides three starting adventures and easy guidelines for creating more.

Advanced Character Creation

For veteran role players, there are the advanced rules. The character creation process is well laid out, and follows the order listed at the beginning of the section. There is a picture of the sheet and pointers that show the sections. In addition to this, small sidebars identify and give brief explanations of the part the pointer indicates as well as the corresponding page in the Character Creation section. This is less confusing than it sounds, and further simplifies the process. I created an advanced character in 35 minutes. This is almost unheard of in most RPGs.

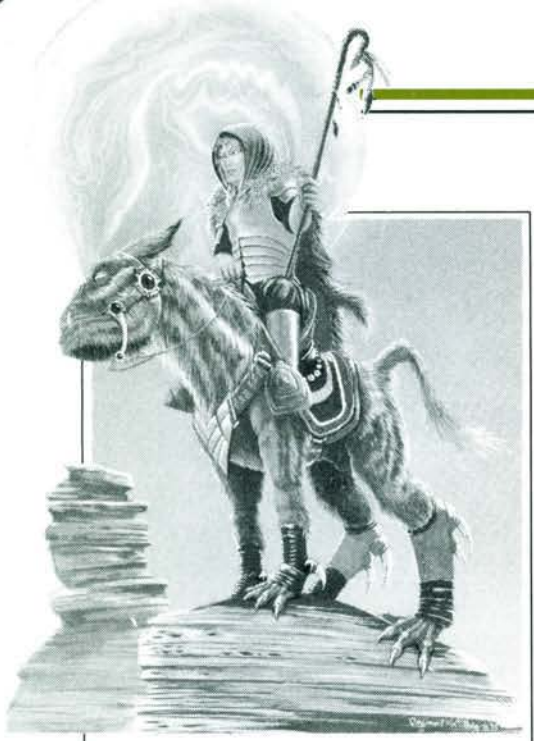
Advanced Rules, Game Points, and Scripting the Game

Just as before, the rules explanations proceed in a logical, straightforward fashion. It starts with turn order, goes on to scale and movement, and leads into combat. Combat is divided into attack types, and includes a simple explanation of how to attack in the system. One-page explanations of modifications, such as armor and dodging, follow along with the obligatory damage charts. The explanation of Game Points (earned experience) is four pages long and easy to understand.

There are some very nice points made on how to script the game. The techniques explained apply not only to this game, but to any other system as well. In addition to this, there is an advanced game scenario included to get you started. All in all, Mr. Pondsmith has produced a unique product which proves that you don't have to be a Rhodes scholar to have fun.

Dream Park Multi-Genre Role Playing Game
Publisher: R.Talsorian Games
Price: $16.00
Designer: Michael Pondsmith
Product Info: R. Talsorian Games
PO Box 7356
Berkeley, Ca. 94707
Please Send SASE

Please continue to send me your ideas and suggestions.



About the Cover

Artist Ray Van Tilburg captured this quiet moment for a galactic freedom fighter and wardog friend on the planet Gellefon.

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Notes From HQ

Tournaments, Conventions, and Writers, Oh my!

The names of several veteran Network tournament authors are gracing the covers of gaming products.

HQ congratulates them on their work and hopes to see more from them in the future.

Rembert Parker of Florida recently penned *Airwaves,* an adventure for the Over The Edge system by Atlas Games.

John Terra of the Valiant 13th Regiment fame is the author of numerous TSR, Inc. and West End Games products. His latest endeavors include paperbacks set in the Torg world. One of his Torg adventures is featured in this issue of the Newszine. It won an upcoming award in a club tournament competition.

Tom Prusa, who has written more tournaments than anyone, has had material published in numerous TSR products. His most recent endeavor is *The Shining South,* A 96-page FORGOTTEN REALMS® supplement. He also authored creatures in the DARK SUN® Monstrous Compendium, which includes creatures by member **Walt Baas.**

Don Bingle has a section in the new FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set, as well as a piece of *Undermountain, The Deep Levels* boxed set, the sequel to the original Undermountain product.

Laura Craig and **Linda Bingle** are editors for *Undermountain, The Deep Levels.* Linda also edited the Network's *Fiend Folio*—which was written entirely by members.

Nicky Rea has a piece of the DRAGONLANCE® Book of Lairs. So does **Skip Williams.**

Wes Nicholson, who operates our Australian branch, has creatures appearing in numerous Monstrous Compendiums.

Nicky and Wes combined their talents for *Space Lairs,* a 64-page anthology of adventures for the SPELLJAMMER® setting.

Pick up these fine products and discover the creativity and cleverness of your fellow Network members. We'll keep you posted as other members have gaming supplements published.

A Reminder

Don't forget about our contest mentioned last issue. The deadline is upon us—**September 1.**

Here's a quick recap:

Does the ROLE PLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION™ Network need to change its name? Is the organization's call words too much of a mouthful?

We want your opinion. What would you call this organization if you had a chance to name it? What would you call our official magazine?

Decide whether the Network and its magazine should have new names.

Send your responses to:

What's In A Name
RPGA® Network
P.O. Box 515
Lake Geneva, WI 53147

Prizes: Members who submit winning names will receive an assortment of TSR, Inc. products.

Convention Query

We're curious how many Network members attend conventions. We want to know what you like and dislike about gaming conventions, and what you think about the Network tournaments offered there.

Why do you go to conventions? How many conventions do you attend a year? Do you attend nearby conventions, or do you hop a plane and travel to one far away? When you're at conventions what activities do you participate in—tournaments, seminars, volunteer work?

And for those of you who don't attend conventions—why not? We want to know why people choose not to attend gaming events.

The Network has an extensive collection of tournaments it provides conventions. In addition, we sanction other activities at conventions, such as writers' workshops, Living City magic shops, question & answer sessions, and more.

Despite our work, we get little feedback. We want to know if we're on the right track. We want to know who we are serving at conventions.

There's your challenge this month—write us a brief letter commenting on your convention experiences. We also want to hear from those of you who do not attend conventions. And for those of you who do not attend conventions, tell us why not and what services you would like to see from the Network.

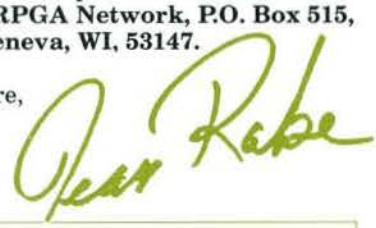
Deadline for Responses: October 20.

Prizes: We will randomly draw the names of one dozen members who responded to our Convention Query and send them off a nifty prize. We tend not to specify prizes because that way we can glom onto some new products that come out about the time our contest ends and send out something "nifty" and recent.

Send your responses to: **Convention Query, RPGA Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI, 53147.**

Take Care,

Jean



A Note From Norm

Just a quick plea for help. We are attempting to make sure that our files on tournament authors at Network Headquarters are complete.

I recently sent letters to all the members we have listed as authors to confirm their tournament writing histories. However, I am not sure all our authors are listed in our files.

In addition, we have some old tournaments with the author listed as unknown.

If you wrote a tournament, sanctioned by the RPGA® Network before May 5th, 1993, please take the time to write and tell us about it.

It would help if you could supply as much of the following as possible when you write: The title of the tournament, the system, the number of rounds, the date of submission, when and where it was first run, and a copy of the tournament if available. Thanks.

Norm

Letters

Gaming Through The Mail And Newszine Reactions

Thanks for publishing an interesting, well-written article about play-by-mail gaming. I always appreciate it when my favorite hobby gets some extra publicity, even when a misguided author manages to write three whole pages without once mentioning my company. (That's a joke, folks.) I do, however, take issue with three points in his article.

1. He says in his article that "It wasn't until the 80s that entire companies were set up for the sole purpose of marketing play-by-mail games...." Since Mr. McCoy has apparently never played a Flying Buffalo PBM game, I suppose I can't fault him for not knowing that I have been running my PBM games since 1970, and that Flying Buffalo was incorporated in the state of Arizona in 1972 for the purpose of running PBM games. We do other things in addition to PBM now, but in 1972 that was our purpose. I don't recall specifically when my first competitors started showing up, but I believe it was in the late 1970s.

2. I agree that hand-moderated PBM games and computer assisted hand-moderated PBM games are usually a lot more flexible than computer-moderated ones, but Mr. McCoy left out one of the most important disadvantages of hand-run PBM games: moderator burn-out. The best hand-run games involve a tremendous amount of creativity and hard work from a dedicated moderator who must keep track of what all the players in the game are doing, and personally handle all of the game turns whenever they come in—regardless of illness, family emergencies, or whatever.

The game will be great fun, and the moderator almost certainly won't charge you as much money as he or she really should (even if they are more expensive than computer-run games). But the games almost always eventually end in "moderator burn-out." It may happen suddenly or slowly. Nothing lasts forever, but before you spend a lot of time and money and emotional involvement in a hand-run PBM game, you should think about how you will feel when the game collapses.

This is nothing against hand-run PBM moderators. Some of them are great. But no matter how talented and dedicated they are, you can't keep it going forever.

The difference between hand-run and computer-moderated games is more than just price and speed vs. flexibility. If you join a Starweb game, you can be sure that the game will continue to the end. We have been running Starweb since 1976 and have run more than 1,100 games from beginning to end. We've never had to cancel a game of Starweb in all that time.

3. The third point is the really important one. Mr. McCoy mentions briefly that there are at least two magazines devoted to PBM, but does not name either one or give their addresses. He does mention two of the more than 150 different PBM companies currently providing games today. And no doubt some of our readers will like the games that those two companies provide. But Mr. McCoy is being somewhat selfish in recommending only his favorite companies, without providing a way that your readers can find out about the hundreds and hundreds of other PBM games out there.

Here are the addresses of the two major PBM magazines. The companies might charge for sample copies.

I realize that although Flying Buffalo has almost a dozen different PBM games available, even we couldn't satisfy the tastes of all your readers.

Flagship
c/o J. Browning
PO Box 6105WSS
Gainesville GA 30504

Paper Mayhem
1518 Adams St.
Ottawa IL 61350

Rick Loomis
Flying Buffalo
Scottsdale, AZ

We received several responses to Rich McCoy's article about play-by-mail gaming in a recent POLYHEDRON® Newszine. Would the readers like to see more material on play-by-mail gaming?

I like *Into The Dark.* I don't get much out of *The Everwinking Eye.* Could you please bring back *Wolff & Byrd?*

The Living Galaxy is almost worth the subscription price itself. The adventures are okay, but the only one I ever used was the one in the introductory issue.

I like the contests, except the ones that show you a picture and say, "who is this?"

I agree wholeheartedly with everything John Reynolds said about the under 16 division.

One more thing, I'm not running any games for you at the GEN CON® Game Fair because you don't have any Paranoia or Chill, and I want to play Shadowrun this year. If you for some reason add any Paranoia let me know. I can (and will) run Paranoia, even on short notice.

Kevin Hansen
Grafton, WI

Consider yourself recruited. We are running several slots of Paranoia at the Game Fair.

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The Living City

Friar Cookpot

by Craig Petillo and Scott Douglas

The summer sun beats down on the profusion of tents and stalls outside Ravens Bluff's north gate.

A deep, singing voice catches your attention.

"Are you going to Ravens Bluff fair?
Jugglers, mages, bubbly pie.
Be sure to try my edible wares.
Eat the best your money can buy.
Fresh baked goodies, lovely sweetmeats.
Try my bean pie and my eclair.
One fine meal for one silver piece!"

The voice comes from a butterball of a dwarf, covered from the top of his balding gray head to the tip of his worn black boots with a fine dusting of flour. Sporting plain monk's robes and a grease-stained apron, he continues his performance by hawking his wares, mostly baked goods, from the platform atop his brightly painted cart. The cart contains his stock, supplies, utensils, his stove and oven, and apparently all of his personal effects.

Laundry hangs on a line strung between the top of the black metal chimney and the front seat of the cart. You spot a bedroll tucked behind the wooden seat, which is serving as a crude stage for the dwarf. Prominently displayed about his neck is a plain silver disk, the symbol of the goddess Tymora. A gold coin also hangs from a leather thong around his neck, though it isn't as easy to notice as the holy symbol.

Hitched to the front of the cart is a tired brown mule with a patch over its left eye. The animal looks through the crowd with a dull, bored stare. It turns its head toward its master as the dwarf splashes something from a long-necked bottle into a hot pan. Blue flames, with touches of yellow and orange, shoot skyward. The crowd is astonished, but nearby tent owners look worried.

"Praise be to Tymora," shouts the dwarf. "Eat and praise Tymora."

Friar Cookpot

2nd Level Male Dwarf Cleric

STR: 12
INT: 11
WIS: 16
DEX: 10
CON: 16
CHR: 14 (18)

AC Normal: 3
AC Rear: 3
Hit Points: 20
Alignment: Neutral
Languages: Dwarven, Common, Orcish, Goblin, Kobold, Gnomish
THAC0: 20

Age: 163
Height: 4′ 2″
Weight: 259 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Balding red with gray streaks/Brown

Weapon Proficiencies: Morning star, club
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Cooking (18), firebuilding (15), healing (14), singing (14), animal handling (15), appraisal (16)
Magic Items: *Ring of protection +1, ring of human influence, stone of good luck, potion of healing, potion of extra healing, horseshoes of speed* (mounted on Sal, the mule)
Spells/day: 4 3
Spells carried: *Cure light wounds, command, detect magic, sanctuary, enthrall, speak with animals, withdraw*

Hephtos, or Friar Cookpot, is a rolly-polly street vendor. He usually occupies a prominent spot across from the Ravens Bluff market, in the tent town, or near the harbor gate.

Despite his claim to worship Tymora, he is secretly a devotee of Vergedain. The gold coin he wears is Vergedain's symbol. Cookpot poses as a Priest of Tymora to gain favor with the local clerical circle and to put him in a better light with the humans.

Under his clerical robes he wears splint mail. A pouch belted to his waist contains healing potions and spell components, and his morning star hangs within easy reach.

Cookpot starts his business day by putting something aromatic on to cook, breaking into song, and doing his best to attract customers. His cooking style involves frequent flourishes and rapid hand movements. These gestures serve more than entertainment. Cookpot cleverly disguises the verbal and somatic components of many of his clerical spells during his show.

For example, Cookpot might appear to be boisterously stirring a pot, while actually casting a *detect magic* spell on the crowd. Likewise, his careful gaze at the crowd is more than just for effect—he is using his ability to appraise any visible gems and jewelry.

Once he finds one or more targets with particularly pleasing baubles, Cookpot takes his finished dish, passes out helpings to people in the crowd, and then moves about with a collection plate. While doing so, he uses the *charm* and *suggestion* powers from his *ring of human influence.*

If the victims fail their saving throws, they feel compelled to give Cookpot the items the dwarf wants.

Cookpot's recipes are extraordinary, though most of them contain beans and grain. Cookpot has two collections of his recipes for sale: "1001 Ways To Cook Beans," and "Cobblers And Pies: Baked Beans Can Be Fun."

Cookpot's favorite recipe is the famed "L'Orange Beans Flambe With Slag Sauce." This is the dish the dwarf likely will be cooking when he is spotted by an adventuring party.

If Cookpot is discovered *charming* an individual, he casts *sanctuary* on himself and tries to melt into the crowd.

Sal, Mule: Int Animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 12, 24 with *horseshoes of speed*; HD 3; hp 17; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1-2/1-6; SZ M; ML 7; XP 65.

Sal, a flea-bitten old mule, is Cookpot's friend, one-eyed lookout, accomplice, and escape route.

Sal knows her part well. The mule brays knowingly to emphasize various portions of Cookpot's sales pitch. The mule has been taught to nuzzle up to customers to elicit sympathy, to bow on cue, and to gallop away with her master on board when trouble arises.

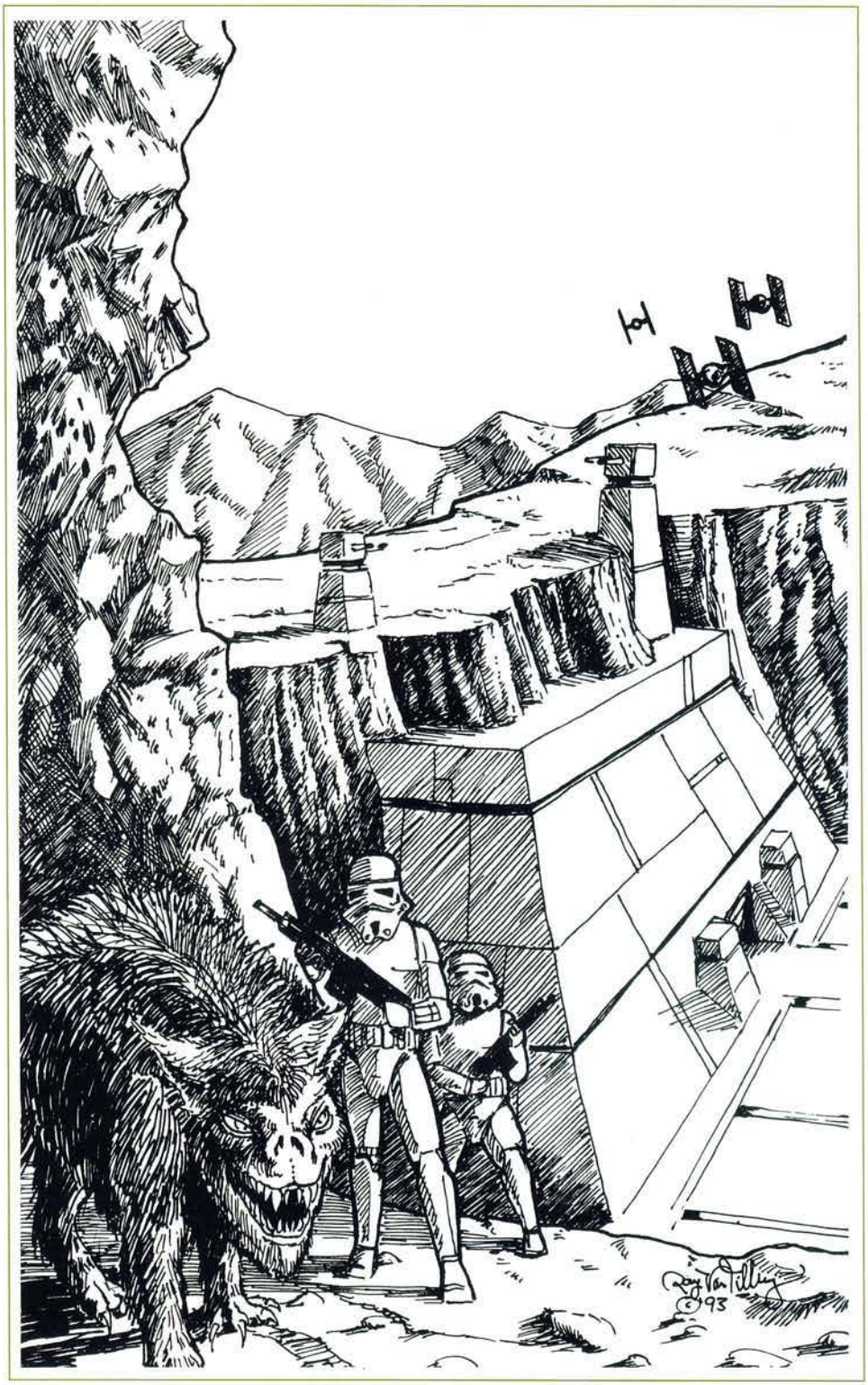
❑

The New Republic Campaign

Preparing to Move Beyond the Movies

by Bill Slavicsek

From the first time he saw Star Wars *in May of 1977, the author has been caught up in George Lucas's amazing galaxy. As luck would have it, he was working as an editor at West End Games when that company produced* Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game *in 1987. For more than three years, he directed, edited or designed over 50 adventures, sourcebooks, and galaxy games for the product line. He recently completed* The Updated Guide to the Star Wars Galaxy *for LucasArts and Ballantine Books, due out later this year. Now, as a designer/editor on staff at TSR, Inc., he has moved on to other things. Or so he thought. A few of his co-workers have convinced him to start up an ongoing* Star Wars *campaign—which has become the basis for this series of articles.*



What Do You Do After Blowing Up the Second Death Star?

With the release of Timothy Zahn's Star Wars trilogy (*Heir to the Empire, Dark Force Rising,* and *The Last Command*), Dark Horse Comics' *Dark Empire* series, and West End Games' *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game Second Edition,* the far away, long ago galaxy has been expanded beyond the events we all thrilled to in the original movie trilogy.

Until George Lucas gets around to producing new films, we'll have to make do with the excellent stories and supplementary materials already in the stores or moving at lightspeed to fill the shelves in the near future. For those of you who have been playing the *Star Wars RPG* for any length of time, you probably know that the original edition of the game and its supplements were all set during the three-year period that began with the Battle of Yavin and ended with the assault on Hoth. Now that we know what happens after the Battle of Endor and the death of the Emperor (at least according to the tales mentioned above), it's only natural for all campaigns to begin moving into the new time frame.

Before you move beyond, however, you

have to get your campaign caught up by dealing with a few major "historical" events. (I'll actually answer the question I posed in a later article.) When I was about to introduce the new time frame to my players, I decided to start with the off-screen event that launched the massive conflict called the Battle of Endor. Yes, I'm talking about Mon Mothma's important line delivered during the Alliance briefing from *Return of the Jedi.* "Many Bothans died to bring us this information," the Supreme Commander of the Alliance informed the crowd as she revealed the existence of a second Death Star. These Bothans, led by Borsk Fey'lya, provided not only the secret location of the battle station's construction site, but also the news that the Emperor would be there at a specific time in the near future. This significant event, not shown on screen or dealt with by the main characters, makes an excellent adventure for a group of *Star Wars RPG* PCs.

Note: You'll need *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game Second Edition* to make use of this adventure and its campaign setting. While not necessary, *The Star Wars Sourcebook, Heir to the Empire Sourcebook* and *Dark Force Rising Sourcebook* will help add plenty of details concerning the Star Wars galaxy. While the basic skeleton of an adventure is presented here, the gamemaster is encouraged to flesh it out to best suit his group and existing campaign. All NPC statistics are presented at the end of the adventure.

A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

Let's back up a bit. The Alliance is still reeling from the unexpected assault on Hoth and the news from the Bothan spies has yet to be delivered to High Command. A Bothan faction currently works in the Imperial interior, gathering intelligence for the Alliance. This Bothan spy network, known as Deep Ear, has only one contact to the Alliance—a lone agent operating on an Outer Rim planet whose primary assignment is to wait for deliveries from Deep Ear and then pass them on to High Command. When the adventure begins, this agent (codenamed Watcher) holds perhaps the most important transmission ever received from Deep Ear.

The devastatingly brief message reads: "In possession of information vital to the Alliance. Code Gold. Do not trust comm transmissions. Code Purple. Must deliver in person. Code Green."

Watcher read the datatext with growing anxiety. Code Gold: Highest level of intelligence obtained, pertaining to the Emperor himself. Code Purple: Position compromised, Imperial entanglements inevitable. Code Green: Agents in trouble, need immediate evacuation. Watcher quickly sent a datatext transmission to her contact at High Command. Besides her normal request for a courier, she passed along the Code Green and asked for a ship to handle the job. Unfortunately, Watcher's coded transmission arrived garbled and only partially intact.

Following standard procedures concerning Watcher, High Command decided to send a small group of agents to pick up what it believes to be the newest batch of intelligence. High Command did not know there was trouble, so the Rebel PCs don't know either. For all intents and purposes, it appears to be a routine mission.

To start the adventure, the Rebel PCs receive new orders from their usual contact. These are either delivered in person or sent as a datatext transmission as presented below:

> : Incoming Datatext Transmission
> : Coded
> : ωθχψδφΔμυΓΛωϱσγ+λΨτϱΘ
> : Decoding. . .
> : To (Rebel with strongest Alliance connection or obvious leader, such as a ship captain)
> : Proceed to Kig Dannen Spaceport, Gellefon planet, Korness system
> : Locate the Ravaging Wardog Cantina and receive an information turnover from Alliance agent codenamed Watcher
> : Make contact by ordering seven (or one more than the number of PCs) Green Galaxy drinks at the counter
> : Bring information to Alliance High Command at Keff Base in Sullust system

As the Rebels are expected only to make a simple pickup, passage is arranged on the next public transport (either a spaceliner or merchant freighter) to the Korness system. If they have their own ship and it is not immediately recognizable as an Alliance vessel, High Command may allow them to use it instead.

Episode One: Kig Dannen Spaceport

Kig Dannen Spaceport is a rough and tumble settlement on the world of Gellefon in the Korness star system. Korness lies in that portion of the galaxy referred to as the Outer Rim Territories. Gellefon is a rocky, moderately cool world of crags, mountains, and jagged crevasses. The spaceport rests in a particularly wide, deep crevasse, and is laid out in a manner similar to Mos Eisley. Its docking bays consist of flattened depressions surrounded by protective blast walls which are scattered among the many shops and residences. All kinds of alien species wander the streets of Kig Dannen, oblivious to everything outside the crevasse's jagged walls. To these spacers, Kig Dannen is Gellefon, and everything beyond the spaceport is insignificant.

The human settlers who live on Gellefon labor for a particularly cruel Imperial governor named Schennt. Schennt allows Kig Dannen to remain relatively free and neutrally aligned so that trade and intergalactic contact continue, but the settlements beyond fall beneath his booted Imperial heel. Of Gellefon's native inhabitants, the most prominent species is the gellbeast, or wardog.

These semi-intelligent canine-like creatures grow to the size of large horses and are forced to serve as mounts and guard animals for the Imperials. Fur covered, with a dog-like muzzle, a protruding, fang-filled lower jaw, a tail and clawed feet, a wardog can be a vicious opponent. In the wild, these creatures live in packs and cooperatively hunt prey for food. A few of these wild packs have formed bonds with the human resistance fighters who have sprung up to oppose the Empire's grip on Gellefon. The resistance fighters are sometimes spotted riding atop the great wardogs, wearing hoods and armored breastplates.

Governor Schennt has declared these resisters to be in violation of Imperial law. His militia and stormtrooper contingents have made the capture or elimination of these resisters their number one priority.

Arrival

After the Rebel PCs arrive at Kig Dannen Spaceport, they must wander for awhile to locate the Ravaging Wardog. This is a good place for the GM to use a few setting-establishing encounters with merchants, locals, and visiting spacers. One spacer whose last stop was Tatooine can drop rumors that something big happened concerning Jabba the Hutt, though the tales she tells are

wild and far from the truth. During their wandering, the Rebels witness the following scene:

> Two stormtroopers escort a badly-wounded local toward the Imperial Governor's domicile in the center of town. As they pass, locals and spacers alike turn away, pretending not to see the plight of the unfortunate. One old woman mutters, "Poor resister, just one less for Starfire's cause."

This is an opportunity for the Rebels to learn about the situation on Gellefon. If they decide to let the stormtroopers and their prisoner pass, one of the locals could be solicited to talk about Aran Starfire and his freedom fighters. If they free the prisoner (after a brief battle with the stormtroopers), they make a friend who can help them later on. Of course, unless the Rebels take great care, the death of two stormtroopers will not go unnoticed.

The Ravaging Wardog

The Ravaging Wardog is a crowded, run-down cantina in a decrepit part of town. Aliens and scruffy-looking humans fill its dark interior, where the sweat of a dozen different species mixes with the aroma of strong drink. If the Rebels follow their instructions, the bartender sets a number of tall drinking utensils on the counter in front of them. Each is filled with a glowing green liquid with swirling bursts of light that look much like stars. After a moment, a green-skinned female approaches. This is the Mikoan named Jade, who the Rebels know as Watcher. She determines if these are the people she has been waiting for, then explains the situation. Jade is a consummate professional, so she asks as many questions as are necessary to determine the Rebels' identity and credentials. Remember, the Rebels should not be expecting a Code Green situation, while Jade is eager to get on with the mission.

To spice up this scene, you could have Jade wait a bit before approaching the Rebels. She spends some time observing them as other customers begin to take an interest. Typical encounters could include: a large, non-Basic-speaking alien with a taste for Green Galaxies who wants to share one with the Rebels (though his inability to communicate effectively could cause his actions to be misinterpreted as hostile); a drunken customer who takes a romantic interest in one (or more) of the Rebels; a bar fight (possibly instigated by Jade to test the Rebels' fighting prowess); and a drunken local who climbs atop a table and begins to rant about the terrible criminals who have dared rebel against the Emperor's New Order (this is actually someone who Governor Schennt hires periodically to expose Rebel sympathizers in Kig Dannen).

After Jade and the Rebels have made contact and are about to depart, start the next scene.

Babbling Bothan

A Bothan pushes his way into the cantina. He appears disheveled, and his fur ripples with agitation. He makes his way through the crowd to stand directly in front of Jade. It is obvious that the two know each other, though Jade seems to favor the Bothan with a look of contempt. The Bothan, Borsk Fey'lya, ignores the Rebels, launching into a dialog with the merc.

> "Don't look so surprised to see me, Watcher," the Bothan sneers, his eyes darting from side to side. "Everything has gone wrong, and I need your help. While I was off investigating a possible leak in our network, my agents came across some important information. I intercepted the same datatext transmission they sent you and hurried off to meet them. When I got to the rendezvous point, I found dead Bothans everywhere. The Imperials must have killed at least two dozen of my people. The rest were being herded onto a transport in shackles. I was torn between following the transport and coming back here to get help. Luckily, the Empire made my decision easy—the remnants of Deep Ear have been locked away in the Imperial detention center on this planet!"

Borsk rants on and on in increasingly louder tones until Jade or the Rebels tell him to be quiet and calm down. He finally agrees, though his fur continues to ripple.

As this was the nearest system to the Bothan rendezvous point, it became a convenient place for the Empire to store the captured spies until transport to a more secure facility could be arranged. Jade knows there are rumors of a detention center outside Kig Dannen, but she doesn't know exactly where it is. The rest of this scene involves the Rebels doing whatever they can to locate the center and learn about its defenses. Bribery, computer break ins, and even sneaking around the governor's domicile are all possible ways to gather clues.

Episode Two: Assault on Pinnacle Keep

Pinnacle Keep is the Imperial detention center of Gellefon. It is located within a hollowed-out crag far from the spaceport and spying eyes. Governor Schennt had the facility built to hold captured members of Starfire's resistance, but few of them survive to be imprisoned. The desolate place is guarded by 30 stormtroopers, 15 Imperial troopers, four gellbeasts, and two probots. The Imperial troopers have two landspeeders with blaster cannons mounted on them (6D damage).

The GM is encouraged to map out the crags around the keep and the interior, noting the location of guards, control rooms, and detention cells—especially cells holding the eight remaining Bothans from the Deep Ear spy network. If Rebel PCs made particularly good *search, investigation* and *security* rolls, you might want to provide them with a few maps of the area, though they cannot locate a complete set of schematics. Through their investigations they find that the Bothans are scheduled to be deported when the Star Destroyer *Invincible* arrives in two days. The Rebels have that long to spring the Bothans and recover whatever information they possess before a legion of stormtroopers descends upon Gellefon.

Meeting Starfire

On the approach to the keep, the Rebels encounter six resistance fighters riding atop wardogs. The fighters tend to be cautious, never sure who or what might be on the side of the Empire. This could be played as a wary meeting or as a brief fight, but eventually the two sides should realize they need to work together.

The resistance fighters take the Rebels to a hidden base. Here, the PCs meet Aran Starfire. If the Rebels are eloquent and convincing, Starfire provides them with two guides to take them to Pinnacle Keep. Jade asks Starfire if the resistance fighters would be willing to stage a diversion so the Rebels will have an easier time getting into the prison. Starfire agrees, and Jade and Borsk remain behind to help organize that end of the mission.

Behind the Scenes

For the record, the information the Bothans brought back for the Alliance was leaked purposely by the Emperor. His plan was to set a trap for the Alliance and Luke Skywalker, using himself as bait. Simply put, by leaking not only the location of the Death Star construction site but also the fact that the Emperor would be touring the facility, the Emperor was providing two tempting targets for the Rebellion. He knew that the Alliance could only respond by throwing everything it had at the site. The Emperor, however, would be waiting for the Rebels with a fleet of Star Destroyers and a working Death Star. The Bothans were merely the ones chosen to unsuspectingly relay this information to the Rebellion.

While Governor Schennt believes he has been honored by receiving these important prisoners, in fact his planet was chosen because it was the place from which the Rebellion would try to rescue the Bothans. The stormtroopers know the Emperor's will and are prepared to let the spies get away. Schennt and his troopers, however, will do their best to hang on to the prisoners.

Freeing the Bothans

The focus of this episode is the assault on Pinnacle Keep and the rescue of the Bothan spies. With the help of Aran Starfire and his followers, the Rebels should be able to work their way inside. While the raid should be daring and full of raging battles, the goal is for the PCs to reach the Bothans and get out in one piece. Only one Bothan actually needs to make it out alive. The rest can be killed along the way to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation.

Episode Three: Escape from Gellefon

Much of this part of the adventure depends on what plans the Rebels made. Do they have a ship? Do they need to acquire one? Have they convinced Starfire to keep up the pressure so they can get away? Whatever the case, the trek back through the craggy hills can be intense and exciting as Schennt and his men close in.

Once the PCs reach their ship and hook back up with Jade and Borsk, you'll want to throw in a space battle. Schennt could send one of his system patrol craft after the escaping spies, or *Invincible* can arrive to disgorge a swarm of TIE fighters. Again, there is lots of room for intense heroics and near-fatal attacks, but the Imperials want the Bothans to get away with the information—they just want to make it look as convincing as possible. If Schennt is on their trail, he receives orders telling him to capture the prisoners alive. This forces him to hold back a bit and gives the PCs the opportunity to break away and jump to lightspeed.

Ending Credits and Previews

The final scene of this adventure involves the Rebels' ship doing its best to escape the closing Imperials. By the end, the PCs' ship should be badly damaged and hanging on by its last bolts. Let the PCs save the day by escaping to lightspeed, but before they reach a friendly port the ship starts to break apart around them. The timely arrival of a Rebel frigate provides a safe hangar and transport. Their ship should come screaming into the bay, its engines blazing, its hull punctured, its superstructure about to collapse. But the Bothans and their important information have reached the Alliance, and now the assault on Endor can be planned. The theme music kicks in and the credits start to roll.

Next time we'll look at the Battle of Endor and moving beyond to explore the New Republic.

Characters and Creatures

Aran Starfire
Template Type: Resistance Leader
Loyalty: To Gellefon's Settlers
Height: 1.82 meters
Species: Human
Homeworld: Gellefon
Age: 53 Standard Years
DEXTERITY 3D+2
Blaster 6D+2, dodge 6D+2, grenade 4D+1, melee combat 5D+2, melee parry 5D+2
KNOWLEDGE 2D+1
Languages 4D+1, streetwise 5D+1, survival 5D+1
MECHANICAL 3D
Beast riding 5D, repulsorlift operation 4D+1, starship piloting 4D
PERCEPTION 3D+1
Bargain 5D+1, command 6D+1, con 4D+1, hide 5D+2, sneak 5D+2
STRENGTH 3D
Brawling 5D, climbing/jumping 4D+1, stamina 5D+2, swimming 3D+2
TECHNICAL 2D+2
First aid 4D+2, repulsorlift repair 5D+1, security 5D+2, starship repair 4D+2
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 3
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 5
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster (4D damage), vibroblade (STR+3D damage), breast plate armor (+1D to STR for resisting physical damage, +2 for resisting energy damage), 2 medpacs, macrobinoculars
Quote: "Freedom is more than our dream. It is our inalienable right."
Description: Aran Starfire retired to Gellefon to escape the madness of the New Order. Prior to this move, Starfire was a soldier in the Old Republic Army. Tall and lean, with silver-red hair and a stern expression, Starfire was once a consummate soldier. Now he uses his disciplined training in unorthodox ways. His goal is to make so much trouble for the Empire that it simply leaves to find a better, less hostile world. He refuses to believe that the Imperials would rather increase their own presence on Gellefon instead of abandoning it for another planet. He is probably wrong.

Borsk Fey'lya
Template Type: Bothan
Loyalty: To the Bothan people
Height: 1.4 meters
Species: Bothan
Homeworld: Kothlis (Bothan colony)
Age: 35+ Standard Years
DEXTERITY 3D+1
Blaster 4D+1, dodge 5D, melee combat 3D+2, melee parry 3D+2
KNOWLEDGE 3D
Alien species 4D+2, bureaucracy 5D+1, cultures 3D+2, planetary systems 3D+1, streetwise 4D+1, survival 3D+2, value 3D+1
MECHANICAL 2D
Astrogation 2D+1, beast riding 2D+2, repulsorlift operation 3D, starship piloting 2D+2

PERCEPTION 4D
Bargain 6D, command 4D+1, con 5D+2, gambling 5D, hide 5D+1, sneak 4D+2, search 4D+2
STRENGTH 2D+2
Climbing/jumping 4D+2, stamina 3D+2
TECHNICAL 3D
Computer programming/repair 5D, demolition 3D+2, droid programming/repair 3D+2, repulsorlift repair 3D+1, security 5D+1
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 1
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 6
Move: 8
Equipment: Hold-out blaster (2D+2 damage), comlink, datapad, 2 cubes of detonite
Quote: "With this information, the Bothan position in the New Republic will be secure."
Description: Fey'lya appears much like other Bothans, though he dresses very stylishly and carries himself with an air of importance and superiority. He believes in the Alliance, though he feels he should be playing a bigger role in its command structure. After all, the Bothans deserve as much respect as the Mon Calamaris—and if given half the chance—Fey'lya knows he can make more of a contribution than that overly proper Admiral Ackbar.

Bothans
Template Type: Bothan Spy
Loyalty: To Borsk Fey'lya and the Alliance
Height: 1.4 meters
Species: Bothan
Homeworld: Kothlis (Bothan colony)
DEXTERITY 2D+1
Blaster 3D+1, dodge 3D+1
KNOWLEDGE 2D
Alien species 3D, bureaucracy 2D+2, languages 4D, planetary systems 3D+1, streetwise 3D+2
MECHANICAL 1D
Astrogation 2D, communications 4D, sensors 3D+1
PERCEPTION 3D
Bargain 4D, con 4D+1, hide 4D+2, investigation 4D, search 4D+2, sneak 5D
STRENGTH 1D+2
Stamina 3D+2
TECHNICAL 2D
Computer programming 4D, droid programming 4D, security 4D+2
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 0
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 4
Move: 8
Equipment: Comlink, datapad, hold-out blaster (2D+2 damage), encrypt-coded datacards
Quote: "Did you hear what he said?" (fur rippling excitedly)
Description: Bothans are short humanoids covered in cream-colored fur which ripples to reflect their moods. They have pointy ears and wide, expressive eyes. Most other species find their voices to be melodious, though the content of what they say tends to annoy even the most tolerant species.

Gellbeast (Wardog)
DEXTERITY 3D
Claw combat 4D, teeth combat 3D+1
PERCEPTION 3D+1
Hide 4D+1, search 5D+1, sneak 4D+1
STRENGTH 4D+2
Jumping 5D+2, stamina 5D+1
Move: 13
Orneriness: 4D+2
Size: 2.4 meters tall at shoulders
Scale: Creature
Attacks:
Teeth: 5D+1 damage
Claws: 4D+2 damage
Combat: These semi-intelligent creatures can be very vicious when hunting or when pushed. To those they bond with (like the human settlers), they can be amazingly gentle and affectionate. When fighting, they like to leap at opponents, raking them with their sharp claws. Once they get close, they use their bite to finish the battle quickly.

Gellefon Freedom Fighters
Template Type: Gellefon Resister
Loyalty: To Aran Starfire
Height: 1.8 meters
Species: Human
Homeworld: Gellefon
DEXTERITY 3D+2
Blaster 4D+2, dodge 4D+2, melee combat 4D+2, melee parry 4D+2
KNOWLEDGE 2D+1
Streetwise 3D+1, survival 4D+1
MECHANICAL 3D
Beast riding 4D, repulsorlift operation 3D+2
PERCEPTION 3D+1
Con 3D+2, hide 4D+1, sneak 4D+2
STRENGTH 3D
Brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 3D+1, stamina 4D+2
TECHNICAL 2D+2
First aid 3D+2, repulsorlift repair 3D+1
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 1
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 1
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster (4D damage), knife (STR+1D damage), breast plate armor (+1D to STR for resisting physical damage, +2 for resisting energy damage), 1 medpac
Quote: "For Gellefon! For Starfire! For freedom!"
Description: The human settlers who have joined Aran Starfire's bid to drive off the Imperial presence on Gellefon are a dedicated and decently trained lot. Aran demands that his followers learn all they can and conducts many of the training drills himself. A select number of his small band have bonded with the wardogs and ride them into battle against the Imperials.

Governor Schennt
Template Type: Imperial Governor
Loyalty: To the Empire
Height: 1.7 meters
Species: Human
Homeworld: Corulag
Age: 54 Standard Years
DEXTERITY 3D
Blaster 3D+2, dodge 5D, running 4D+2
KNOWLEDGE 4D
Alien species 5D, bureaucracy 6D, cultures 5D, intimidation 5D+2, languages 4D+2, law enforcement 6D, streetwise 4D+1, willpower 6D+1

MECHANICAL 3D+2
Beast riding 4D+2, repulsorlift operation 4D+2
PERCEPTION 3D+1
Bargain 5D+1, command 6D+1, con 4D+1, persuasion 5D+1
STRENGTH 2D
Stamina 4D
TECHNICAL 2D
Computer programming/repair 3D, security 3D
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 0
Dark Side Points: 5
Character Points: 8
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster (4D damage), datapad, comlink
Quote: "I do not believe you understand the seriousness of your situation."
Description: Governor Schennt always wears the most regal attire. His dress uniforms are perfectly pressed, sparkling clean, and covered with every official decoration he ever received. His steel-gray hair, cold-gray eyes, and pale skin add to his intimidating mannerisms. He does not like Gellefon or its people, but he will stop at nothing to enforce the will of the Emperor.

Imperial Troopers
Template Type: Imperial Troopers
Loyalty: To Governor Schennt
Height: 1.8 meters
Species: Human
Homeworld: Various
Age: 19-28 Standard Years
DEXTERITY 3D+1
Blaster 5D+1, dodge 4D+1, grenade 4D+1
KNOWLEDGE 2D+1
Streetwise 3D+1, survival 3D+1
MECHANICAL 2D+2
Beast riding 3D+1, repulsorlift operation 3D+2
PERCEPTION 4D
Search 5D
STRENGTH 3D+2
Brawling 4D+2
TECHNICAL 2D
Demolition 3D
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 0
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 3
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster (4D damage), blaster rifle (5D damage), 2 grenades (5D damage), comlink
Quote: "Surrender! You are in violation of Imperial law!"
Description: Imperial troopers are humans dressed in gray uniforms and open-faced helmets. While not as cold and impersonal as stormtroopers, they still have a high degree of loyalty to the Empire, the New Order, and Governor Schennt.

Jade (codename Watcher)
Template Type: Merc
Loyalty: To Herself
Height: 1.8 meters
Species: Mikoan
Homeworld: Miko
Age: 27 Standard Years
DEXTERITY 4D
Blaster 6D, blaster rifle 7D, brawling parry 4D+2, dodge 5D, grenade 5D, melee combat 5D, melee parry 4D+2
KNOWLEDGE 3D
Alien species 4D, languages 4D, languages: Jawa 4D+2, streetwise 5D, survival 4D+1
MECHANICAL 2D+1
Astrogation 3D+1, communications 4D+1, starship gunnery 4D+1
PERCEPTION 2D+1
Investigation 4D+1, search 3D+2, sneak 4D+2
STRENGTH 2D+2
Brawling 4D+2, climbing/jumping 3D+2, stamina 4D+1
TECHNICAL 3D+2
Blaster repair 4D+2, droid repair 4D+1, first aid 4D+2, starfighter repair 4D, security 5D
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 2
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 9
Move: 10
Equipment: Comlink, datapad, backpack, 3 grenades (5D damage), vibroblade (STR+3D damage), blaster rifle (5D damage), blast vest (+1D to STR for resisting physical damage, +1 for resisting energy damage), protective helmet, 2 medpacs
Quote: "I hate working with amateurs."
Description: Jade is a green-skinned female who could pass for a standard human except for her unusual pigmentation. She has piercing green eyes, long black hair, and an athlete's figure. Every move she makes is artistic and confident, hinting at the competence and training she has undergone. Though she is currently working for the Alliance, she does not consider herself to be part of the Rebellion. Once she agrees to take on a contract, however, she follows it through to the end.

Imperial Stormtroopers
Template Type: Imperial Stormtrooper
Loyalty: To the Emperor
Height: 1.8 meters
Species: Human?
Homeworld: Unknown
Age: Unknown
DEXTERITY 2D
Blaster 4D, dodge 4D
KNOWLEDGE 2D
MECHANICAL 2D
PERCEPTION 2D
STRENGTH 2D
Brawling 3D
TECHNICAL 2D
Force Sensitive?: No
Force Points: 0
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 2
Move: 10
Equipment: Blaster (4D damage), stormtrooper armor (+1D to STR for resisting damage, −1D to DEX skills), helmet comlink, utility belt with supplies
Quote: "This area is restricted. Move along."
Description: Stormtroopers are completely covered by black and white armor. Their helmets make their voices sound mechanical.

Golem, Mechanical (Ahmi Vanjuko) by Bill Connors

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Temperate Forests
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-2
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	13 (75 hp)
THAC0:	7
NO. ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	4-40 (4d10)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	Man-sized (7′ tall)
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	15,000

Of all the tragic and misshapen creatures to survive the nightmare experiments of fiends like the wizard Hazlik or the mad butcher Markov, none is more dreadful than Ahmi Vanjuko. Once a ranger and great explorer, Vanjuko has been imprisoned in a metal body powered by the sinister magic of Easan, the deranged lord of Vechor.

Prior to his transformation, Vanjuko was a strong ranger who stood just over five a half feet tall. His hair was a dark, earthy brown and his eyes were the cool green of fresh mint leaves. His skin was a rich sienna, worn rough by his years exploring the wilds of countless worlds. His smile, it is said, could charm man and beast alike, and his charisma earned him the love of innumerable maidens in countless kingdoms.

All that changed when Vanjuko was drawn into Ravenloft. Under the careful attention of the dark wizard Easan, his spirit was implanted in a mechanical golem.

Vanjuko's new body stands a little more than seven feet tall and looks vaguely human. It is slender, with long legs that might be likened to a bird's. The arms are gangly and apelike. The hands are three-fingered gripping devices with extendable razors in place of fingernails. A head shaped like a human skull rests atop the machine's cylindrical body. The golem's metallic shell is stronger than any known alloy.

Vanjuko is unable to speak, although the construct might be able to communicate with others if magical or psionic means are used. If spoken to, Vanjuko seems to understand the Common tongue spoken by the men of Oerth. During his travels in Ravenloft, he also learned the languages spoken in Barovia and Vechor, and a sprinkling of the Vistani tongue.

Combat: Vanjuko shuns humanity and has no natural enemies in the wilds of Vechor. As such, he is seldom called upon to defend himself. When he does fight, however, he is a deadly nemesis. The mad Easan intended that his creation be a killing machine.

Like all of the mechanical golems created in Ravenloft, Vanjuko is immune to attack by weapons with less than +2 enchantment. Similarly, he is immune to all but a few magical spells. Because he has a living mind, he can be *charmed* as a normal human and *charm person, charm monster* and *mass charm* spells are effective against him. He also can be *beguiled.* His unnatural nervous system makes *hold* spells, *suggestions,* and other Enchantment/Charm magics ineffective. He is immune to all poisons and diseases. Vanjuko is vulnerable to *dispel magic,* which stuns him for a number of turns equal to the caster's level. During this time, he appears dead; however, a *detect magic* or similar spell reveals a magical aura lingering about the golem which grows stronger as he begins to recharge himself.

Vanjuko's primary attack is made with his finger razors. Each round, he is able to strike with these weapons, inflicting 4d10 points of damage with each successful hit. On an attack roll of 20 a powerful electrical current is discharged into the victim's body. When this happens, the victim must save vs. spells. If the save succeeds, the victim suffers 3d6 points of additional damage. If the save fails, the victim suffers 6d6 points of additional damage, and the victim's items must save versus lightning or be destroyed. Further, the victim must save vs. paralysis or be incapacitated for 2d4 rounds due to muscle spasms triggered by the electrical discharge.

If an opponent using a metal melee weapon hits Vanjuko with an attack roll of a natural 20, the golem can channel an electrical current through the weapon. The attacker suffers damage and risks incapacitation just as if he had been hit with the electrical attack described above. The electrical discharge does not reduce the damage the golem suffers from the weapon.

Once every three rounds, Vanjuko can trigger a *lightning aura* that surrounds his mechanical body. This *aura* is a deadly electrical field that lasts one round. Any creature coming within 20 feet of Vanjuko is struck with numerous filaments of lightning, which cause 3d6 points of damage. A save vs. breath weapon is allowed for half-damage (no incapacitation check need be made).

As a ranger, Vanjuko had many useful powers and special abilities. In his new mechanical form, however, most of these have been lost. He retains the ability to cast some clerical spells, but only those he had memorized at the time of his transformation. Thus, he can use the following spells once per day: *entangle, pass without trace,* and *warp wood.* He casts these spells as if he were a 3rd level cleric.

Animals will have nothing to do with this unnatural construct. No creature will come within 50 feet of Vanjuko unless held or calmed. All animals—even the most devoted dogs and warhorses—refuse to come within 20 feet of the golem. If forced to do so, the animals become violent and do whatever they must to free themselves and leave the abomination's presence.

Habitat/History: Ahmi Vanjuko was born in the wondrous City of Greyhawk. He quickly learned that the urban life of men was not for him. Before he had reached the age of 10, he vanished into the wilds and started a new life among the animals of the green forest.

In time, he came to know every creature that shared his wilderness home with him. He learned to hunt and stalk like the wolf, to sing and play like the bird, and to lurk and pounce like the cougar. By the time he reached adolescence, the forest was very much a part of him.

One day, a strange figure came to the lands he called his own and began to build—something. Although he resented this intrusion, Vanjuko took no action against this intruder. In time, the construction took the shape of an elegant manor house surrounded by a virtual wall of tangling vines laced

Golem, Mechanical (Ahmi Vanjuko)

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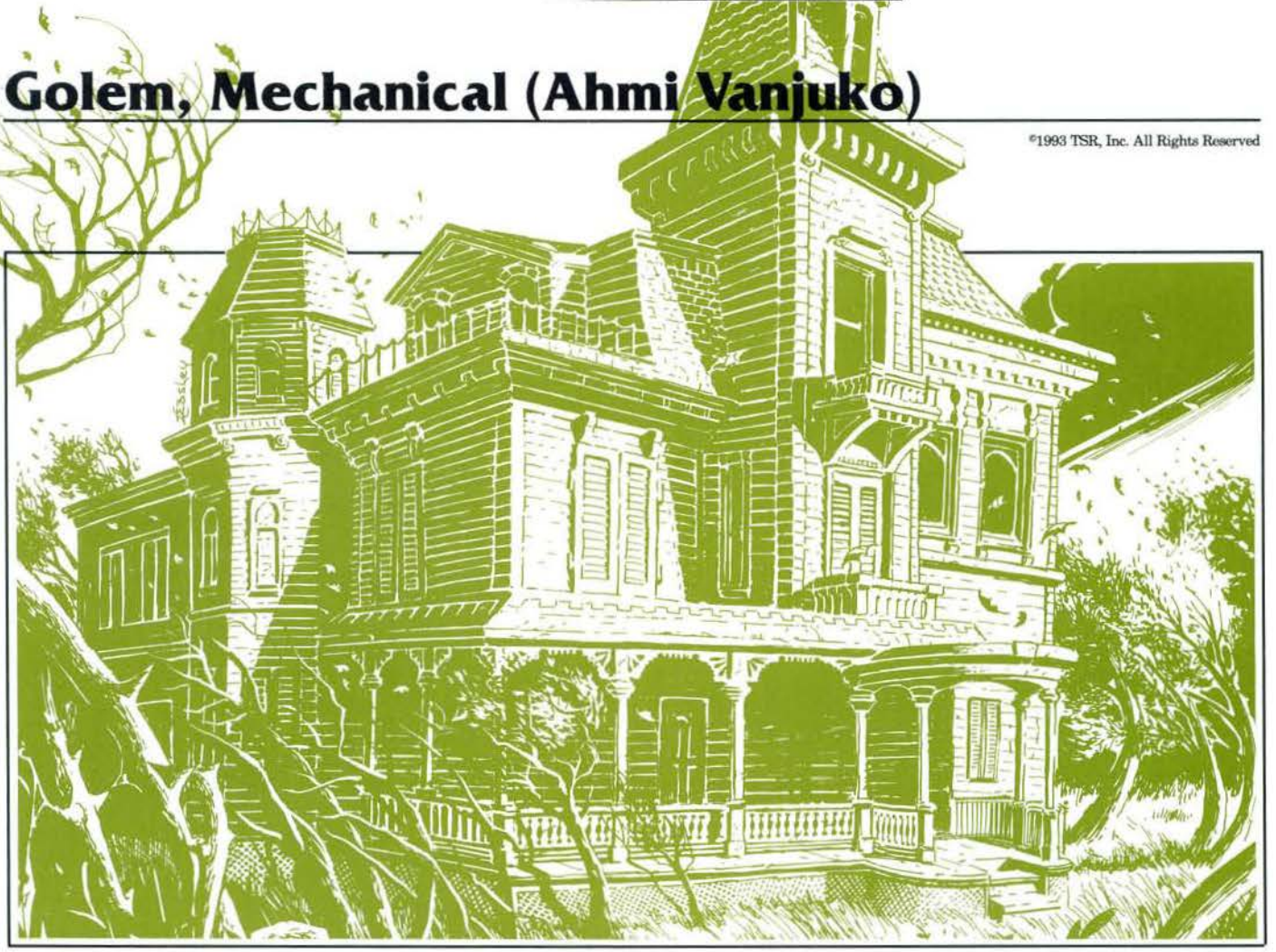

with poisonous thorns. To any other man, these thorns might have been a barrier. To Vanjuko, who knew the ways of the wild, they were nothing more than an annoyance.

Determined to see what was going on behind this living fence, Vanjuko made his way through the thorns and into the lands beyond. To his horror, he found that the splendor of the forest had been obliterated near the manor. Pools of deadly poisons littered the landscape, the plants were withering away in toxic soil, and discarded trash lay everywhere. The animals caught inside the thorns were sick, dying, or dead, and the air carried an unnatural stench.

Vanjuko vowed to see to it that the monster who had done these terrible things left the forest before he could do any more harm. Filled with righteous fury, he moved quickly to the manor's entrance and burst inside. He saw no immediate sign of the place's builder and began to search the house. At every turn, however, he was confronted with mechanisms designed to kill unwanted intruders. In the end, these proved too deadly for him, and Vanjuko was forced to leave the building.

To his surprise, however, he found that the grounds outside had been engulfed in a rolling, macabre fog. Before he had travelled half the distance to the thorn barrier, Vanjuko was utterly lost and all but blinded by the blanket of mist. He settled down to wait for the visibility to improve. When it cleared an hour later, he found that he was no longer in his forest. Instead, he was in the domain of Katakass.

Vanjuko began to explore the strange new land in which he found himself, hoping to uncover a way back to his native land and the forest he loved. From the domain of Harkon Lucas, he traveled north into Gundarak and then east into Strahd's own Barovia. For a time, he lived among the rustic folk of that mountainous domain, enjoying their simple way of life and learning their language.

While in Barovia, he met a young woman named Tanya, and the two fell deeply in love. She was a gypsy girl who lived a nomadic life traveling from city to city where she would entertain with her family. One night, Tanya came to him and said that her people were leaving just before dawn. She kissed the ranger gently and bid him farewell, weeping at the thought that they might never meet again. Vanjuko pleaded with her to remain with him in Barovia and become his wife. She smiled, clearly tempted by the idea, but refused. Hers was the wanderer's life, she explained, and her people were the Vistani.

Despite the warnings of his newfound friends, Vanjuko decided that he would not lose the woman he loved. Shortly before sunrise, he went to the clearing where Tanya's family had camped, only to find that they had already left. He dashed off in pursuit, following their trail to the east. He caught sight of their wagons as they rolled into a bank of fog. Without pause, he spurred his horse to greater speed and dashed into the mists after them.

Emerging from the rippling vapors, Vanjuko found no trace of Tanya or her clan. Instead, he discovered that he had been again transported by the whims of Ravenloft's mists. This time, he was in the domain of Vechor. Attempting to get his bearings and learn what was going on, Vanjuko made his way to Abduk on the shores of the Nostru River. In the distance, high atop the Cliffs of Vesanis, he saw the elegant manor house where, he was told, the madman Easan lived. To his horror, Vanjuko realized that this was the same house he had seen in the wilderness of his native Oerth.

Blaming Easan for his original abduction by the mists of Ravenloft, the ranger began to plan revenge against the

Golem, Mechanical (Ahmi Vanjuko)

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mad wizard. When he learned that he could not rally the people of Vechor to overthrow their foul lord, he left them and returned to his life among the plants and animals of the forest.

In Vechor's wilds, he found all manner of pathetic creatures which were unknown to him. The majority of these things, he learned, were the result of Easan's horrible experiments. He also learned that the mad wizard's research did not end with animals. The ranger found countless species of plants, many evil and deadly, which were the result Easan's tinkering.

By far the most dreadful of the creatures the ranger encountered were the twisted men and women who had survived Easan's experiments. Most were contorted and broken, tragic things known as *broken ones.* A few, however, emerged from the caverns at the base of the Cliffs of Vesanis with mechanical parts grafted onto their bodies. Most of these, thankfully, didn't live long. Those that did, Vanjuko mercifully destroyed to end their pain and suffering.

Vowing to end this madman's butchery once and for all, Vanjuko entered the labyrinth of caves and began to make his way upward to the manor house. The trek took him nearly two days, during which he fought countless creatures more terrible than any he had seen in the forests. By the time he neared the underground entrance to Easan's laboratories, he was nauseous.

Steeling himself to face whatever foul things might lurk beyond, Vanjuko entered. As before, he found the place to be a maze of traps designed to keep intruders out—or perhaps to keep prisoners in. Try as he might, the ranger was no match for the terrible mechanisms and deadly spells that Easan had set up. Shortly after he began to explore the house, Vanjuko accidentally triggered the release of a gas cloud. Expecting nothing but death, he closed his eyes and collapsed.

Much to his surprise, Vanjuko awoke. He found himself strapped to a metal table in the center of a room that looked like a cross between a wizard's laboratory and a torture chamber. For a long time he feigned unconsciousness as he stole glaces at his surroundings. He had hoped to devise a way to escape from the dreadful place, but instead he found himself speculating as to what many of the terrible devices around him might be used for. It wasn't long before he had his answer.

High overhead, two great metal spheres descended on slender poles. Without warning, a great surge of actinic blue light flooded the room as a steady stream of lightning began to flow between the mysterious globes. As Vanjuko watched in horror, the globes descended until they were suspended only a few feet above him. The electrical flow above his body felt like stinging ants crawling over his skin.

Then, as if from nowhere, Easan appeared. He was a short man, almost gnomish with his little features. His beady eyes reminded Vanjuko of the predatory eyes of a ferret. With a cruel smile, the wizard began to examine the ranger. After a few minutes, Easan bent low over the ranger's face. His breath smelled like rotting fish, but Vanjuko's bonds were far too tight for him to turn away.

"Hello my young man," he hissed. His voice was slippery and hushed, barely audible above the cacophony of the lightning machine. "I'm so glad that you came to visit me."

Vanjuko tried to spit in the mad man's face, but found that his mouth had gone dry. Easan found the gesture amusing and chuckled softly to himself. Turning away from his captive, he continued to talk while working with several arcane devices.

"For a long while, I have been planning to complete a great experiment. Time after time, I have attempted to explore the soul and its ultimate origins—only to have the subject die before my work was completed. Indeed, I began to despair of ever finding someone who might have the stamina to help me draw this grand investigation to a close. Imagine my delight when I found an intruder in my own home who could survive one of my most deadly procedures. If you don't survive this experiment, I dare say that no one will."

With that, the shriveled man waddled to a large winch and began to turn it. Slowly, a panel in the floor beside Vanjuko slid open and a second table rose. Whatever was on the table was covered with a white sheet.

With a flourish, Easan swept aside the cloth and revealed a metal body that, although roughly humanoid, was a mechanical nightmare. The wizard laughed when he saw the fear fall across Vanjuko's face.

"I shouldn't worry yourself," he snickered. "When we are finished here today, I shall have transported your soul into this metal body. You will be the father of a new race! I trust you appreciate the honor that I'm granting you. Ah well, let's begin, shall we?"

As Easan chuckled his weasel's laugh, the metal balls began to descend again. The lightning engulfed Vanjuko and the mechanical corpse beside him. The ranger cried out in agony as he felt the arcane energies ripping his body apart. The pain was incredible. He tried to succumb to it, hoping to lose consciousness or even die rather than endure the seemingly endless torment. As blackness engulfed him, the echoing laughter of Easan rang above the roar of the lightning.

And then it was over. Vanjuko was exhausted. The pain was gone, but so was his strength. Unconsciousness claimed him.

Vanjuko had no idea how long he swam in the blissful darkness of oblivion. Finally, he awoke, confused to discover that he was on a metal table. He attempted to sit up, and found that he was strapped down. Then, slowly, the memory of what had happened returned to him.

Praying that this might be some dreadful nightmare, he turned his head and looked along the length of his arm. When he saw the mechanical limb that lay there, he tried to scream. But no sound issued from the mute metal giant that was now Ahmi Vanjuko.

Enraged, he fought to free himself from the shackles, only to find them stronger than he. As he thrashed about, Easan returned. He was smiling, and paid little attention to Vanjuko's struggles.

"Ahhhhh," he hissed, sounding almost cheerful, "is it not as I told you?" Vanjuko tried to lunge at the wizard, but was held in check by the chains on his limbs. Easan seemed genuinely surprised by his behavior. "Don't you understand?" he asked. "I have made you immortal. More than that, I have freed you of the burdens of life. You'll never grow sick or old. You should thank me for the gift that I have given you!"

That was more than Vanjuko could bear. He tried again to break free, and this time the chains could not restrain him. Metal fragments showered around the chamber and Easan sprang back. Vanjuko lunged forward, his metal body moving smoothly and flawlessly in response to his thoughts. With a great whirring of gears, he threw himself at Easan, determined to destroy the wizard. When he reached the spot where the great wizard stood, however, there was nothing but smoke. Through some magic, Easan had fled.

Golem, Mechanical (Ahmi Vanjuko)

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Vanjuko tore the laboratory apart, vowing that he would destroy the beast's lair if he could not have the beast itself. Leaving the building a burning ruin, he fled back into the tunnels and made his way to the forest.

Ecology: Easan has since rebuilt his home. Vanjuko has returned to living in the forest, but he no longer draws the happiness from it he once did. All around him are vibrant living things, animals that now flee from him in terror and flowers that he can no longer smell.

As a mechanical creature, Vanjuko has no hunger or thirst and never sleeps. He lives in a cave hidden away beneath the cascade where the river Nostru tumbles off of the Cliffs of Vesanis.

Each day, he moves about the forests in a search for more products of Easan's twisted work with the black arts. He destroys them when he finds them, ending their suffering as quickly and mercifully as he can.

As mentioned in the **combat** section of this entry, animals cannot bear the presence of Vanjuko. They recognize that he is not a natural thing and abhor him. This is perhaps the most tragic aspect of Vanjuko's life, for the love of animals meant as much to him as the embrace of his beloved Tanya.

Adventure Ideas: Vanjuko is a tragic figure. While he retains a good heart, he is bitter and angry about what has happened to him. He loathes his existence, feeling alone and alien in the world. If it were not for the fact that he feels a compulsion to destroy Easan and all his works, Vanjuko would certainly have taken measures to end his life long ago.

It is this very deep commitment to his task that can lead to matchless adventures. The people of Vechor have seen the mechanical golem moving through the woods from time to time. Not knowing its history or origins, they assume it to be evil.

Any heroes who come into the domain are likely to hear of the creature as well. With the villagers speaking of it as a deadly enemy, the player characters are likely to attempt to hunt down and destroy Vanjuko. When they discover the true nature of their supposed enemy, they might proceed along one of two lines.

First, they could join Vanjuko and attempt to destroy Easan. Although a powerful ally in combat, Vanjuko's hulking form will make it difficult for the PCs to approach the dark lord's manor house without being seen. Vanjuko's knowledge of Easan's methods might be helpful, however. Further, the golem can act as a guide in the exploration of the tunnels that run from the forest to the plateau on which Easan's manor stands.

Alternately, the PCs might begin a search for some technique that could return Vanjuko to a living body. One obvious solution might be the use of *the apparatus,* a terrible artifact originally described in the *Ravenloft II* module and most recently seen in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game adventure *Thoughts of Darkness* and the *Book of Artifacts.* With the help of this contraption, the player characters might be able to arrange for Vanjuko's personality to be implanted in another body. Of course, locating and recovering the artifact (which is the size of a house) will not be an easy task. Finding a suitable body and deciding what to do with the life force that currently inhabits it might pose problems, too.

The Everwinking Eye

Adventures in Zhentil Keep

by Ed Greenwood

"Adventures in Zhentil Keep? Everyone who goes there has them—only they call it merely staying alive!"
Shundar, Mage of Selgaunt, said to an apprentice,
Year of The Unicorn

We'll bid farewell to dreaded Zhentil Keep by enjoying (if that's the word) a few adventures DM™s can inflict on—er, entertain players with.

The DM should keep track of how much attention player characters are attracting among the Zhentarim and their Hands and Worms. Zhentil Keep is heavily policed, and the Zhentarim don't mind emptying the pockets of visitors who seem suddenly or overly wealthy.

The Hands enjoy blackmailing visitors who can be embarrassed back home by revelations about their personal or business activities. Characters victimized in this manner are forced to perform "little" services for the Zhentarim once they leave Zhentil Keep. Skillful use of this practice has made the reach and strength of the Zhentarim across Faerun seem far greater to outside observers than it actually is.

In The Eye Of The Beholder

The PCs hear a dying native of Zhentil Keep gasp, "'Tis in the eye of the beholder—all of it. Beware! The Worms watch!" The character expires immediately. Zhentilar troops, accompanied by a Zhentarim wizard or two, are on hand to carry away the corpse, denying the PCs access to it.

Later, while exploring the city, the party discovers a statue in an intersection of streets near The Black Altar: a beholder atop a slim spire of black stone. The whole statue is carved from one piece of rock.

If PCs care to investigate the statue, they must use magic to do so unobserved by the Hands. Also, at least one Worm is always watching the statue from concealment in an upper floor of a nearby building (through gaps in a boarded-up window). By the time the PCs finish with the statue, this spy is certain to note their actions.

Any PCs who investigate the statue acquire a Worm escort until they leave the city, regardless of whether they take any of the statue's contents or try to find Thralkar (see below). If the party later prepares for any acts against the Zhentarim or law and order in Zhentil Keep, the Hands and the Zhentilar are waiting for them.

Inside the hollowed-out central eye of the statue, a good 70 feet above the street, is a *rod of cancellation,* a scroll with a single *web* spell on it, and a note, in Common: "Had to move the rest to a safer place. See me at the Minotaur. Thralkar"

The precise location of *The Axe And Minotaur* is left to the DM; see issue #85 for a general description of the establishment. If the PCs go there and ask for Thralkar, they are told "He's downstairs, as usual."

Downstairs is an ambush consisting of 12 Hands armed with clubs and daggers (all LE hm F1s, with 8 hp each); Maurgoelethim (a LE hm W5 of the Zhentarim); and Halazondar (a LE hm P5 of Bane, also a member of the Zhentarim). They are dressed in ragged clothing and appear to be engaged in some shady deals. All of them are interested in why the PCs are in possession of stolen "magic of the Lords" and are looking for more. And in case the PCs want to leave at about this point, two Zhentilar (LE hm F6s) in full plate armor come down the stairs behind them. The fighters are armed with heavy crossbows, which are loaded with quarrels tipped in a paralyzing poison (save vs. poison at −1, or be completely paralyzed for 2-5 turns, onset time three rounds).

The dying Zhent and his comrades located and looted one of Manshoon's caches of magic (see issue #85); however, the Zhentarim located all the treasure some time ago. They have been waiting for someone to show up and try to take it away.

If PCs escape the trap at *The Axe And Minotaur,* a discreet Sembian merchant contacts them. The merchant is interested in acquiring "magic of any sort—at reasonable prices, no questions asked" (these "reasonable prices" should be tantalizingly high). If the PCs have found any magic inside Zhentil Keep and sell it to him, the Zhentarim attack the party in strength shortly thereafter—the "Sembian merchant" is yet another Zhentarim mage.

The Tomb of Chaunczil

A number of alleys in the city are dead ends, and the PCs might discover these the hard way while fleeing Hands or press gangs. One of these blind alleys ends in a spot with a board floor. Under the boards (which are not fastened down) are narrow stone steps heading steeply down. The damp tunnels at the bottom bend and twist beneath the city, converging in a sizable chamber with a low ceiling. Within the chamber, a stone casket bears an inscription: "Here sleeps forever the fair Chaunczil. We shall not know her like again."

If they open the casket, the PCs find a jumble of human bones and a wand. This is actually a *polymorphed* succubus (see *MC8 Outer Planes Appendix*, under "Tanar'ri, Lesser—Succubus"). The wand prevents her from *shape changing* back into her normal form. The wand and the bones radiate Abjuration magic, but no alignment. The succubus is released instantly if anyone touches the wand.

Chaunczil was a minor sorceress who died long ago. Recently, the Zhentarim rifled her tomb and left this little trap for people who go looking for magic in the city.

The succubus does not fight unless attacked, but is keen to get revenge on the Zhentarim mages who imprisoned her. The culprits are Sememmon, Yarkul, and the female mage Daershar (LE hf W9). Daershar is married to a non-Zhentarim Lord of Zhentil Keep, Milarkrym; she controls him on the Zhentarim's behalf.

Once released, the succubus sneaks about the city. She tries to surprise her adversaries while they are alone so she can slay them. She also tries to enlist the PCs' aid, *charming* them if necessary.

If any attacks are successful, the Black Network assumes the PCs are after all Zhentarim mages, and act forthwith to remove this threat.

Another Man's Bane

When the PCs have settled down at an inn, a man greets them and offers them 100 gp each to slay some temple guards. This will allow the man to get into the Dark Shrine. If the PCs ask him where the Dark Shrine is, he corrects himself and says "The Black Altar." The man is reluctant to tell the PCs why he needs to get into the tem-

ple, but if pressed, he admits he is trying to rescue his sister, a temple slave.

"She's short, with very long black hair...and, well, a bit curvaceous, you know; Lystaril, she's called. I'm Ithim. We're from Ordulin in Sembia." Ithim offers the PCs an additional 400 gp each if they will go in and help retrieve his sister.

Of course, this is all so much eyewash; the man is really Krothar, a 6th level priest of Bane. Krothar is loyal to The High Imperceptor of Bane. He has come to Zhentil Keep to weaken the temple by slaying as many traitorous priests as possible. His money is good, and he has one genuine magic item: a *cloak of spell reflection*. This reflects any spell cast at its wearer—or any area-effect spell cast as to affect the wearer—automatically back on the caster, doing no damage to the intended target. The cloak disintegrates into worthless dust after the second time it functions. (Spells that cannot be reflected are simply negated.)

"Ithim" places this cloak about the shoulders of the leading PC warrior after the PCs have disposed of the gate guards (two LE hm P3s, armed with maces and hammers). The guards are only six paces from an alarm gong that they have orders to ring before fighting anyone.

If the PCs win past the guards, "Ithim" hurries into the gigantic temple. The place is made of black stone and has many balconies and spires. It is dusky, with polished black marble floors and guttering wall-torches.

If the PCs enter the temple, "Ithim" urges them to "run far and fast—or we'll have to fight every step of the way."

Ithim explains what the cloak is and tells the PCs the priests rarely cast spells inside the temple. ". . . too dangerous; they could set off or destroy all sorts of foul Art; I heard that from a drunken underpriest once." He further warns the PCs to "steer clear of the beholders," and leads them into the depths of the temple, whereupon he dodges aside when the PCs encounter temple priests. Ithim *teleports* away, unobserved, leaving the PCs to fend for themselves.

There is a woman named Lystaril in the temple (LE hf P7). She is a dedicated follower of Fzoul Chembryl. She has a vicious temper and fights with a *mace +3*.

If the PCs are powerful, the DM should bring on the beholders; otherwise, their foray into the temple should be a top-speed, deadly chase of hit-and-run combat and spells. (Prepare a temple map beforehand!) If the PCs can reach the temple roof, there is usually a small skyship (see DRAGON® Magazine, issue #124) moored there that might allow escape. Once the Zhentarim learn what's going on, however, they send flying mages, mages mounted on foulwings (see the *Menzoberranzan* boxed set), and dragons to recover the ship.

Meanwhile, Krothar *teleports* to wherever the PCs are staying and ransacks their treasures and belongings. He'll be long gone when the PCs return, leaving an insulting note of thanks scrawled on the wall in ink.

The Dancer In The Dark

PCs staying in Zhentil Keep are awakened during the wee hours of the morning by the gentle chiming of a tavern dancer's wrist and ankle bells. If they call out loudly, or raise an alarm, the sound ceases and no one sees anything (until the next night).

If the PCs listen and watch quietly, simply ask who's there, or light only a single lamp, they see a veiled female dancing about their rooms, saying nothing but beckoning PCs to follow her.

The dancer is an illusion; she can pass through solid walls. Weapons, grasping hands, or other objects pass right through her. She leads the PCs to secret doors in the outside walls of their rooms, under the windows. These doors open onto a ledge on the outside wall. The "ghost" dances along the ledge to a room and vanishes through its open window.

If PCs investigate, they find a lady identical in appearance to the dancer. She is manacled, and two sleeping warriors in chain mail keep snoring "watch" over her from stools on either side of her bed. The room is otherwise empty, and its door is locked.

The fighters are LE hm F2s, both Zhentilar. One has 18/09 Strength, and both are armed with broad swords and daggers.

The chained lady is Mithilaer Hawkstar, a CG hf 12th level Illusionist. She is a Harper from Secomber. A minor Zhentarim mage is holding her here until she tells him the secrets of certain spells (whereupon he plans to have her quietly killed).

The mage, one Belthim, is a LE hm W4 who is specializing in illusions to increase his own standing in the Dark Network. He is concealing Mithilaer from his fellow Zhentarim, and will try to defeat any rescuing PCs if either guard is slain (magical alarms alert him).

Belthim comes alone, armed with his spells and with six darts and a knife. The darts are poisoned with a venom that causes sleep (saving throw negates effects) for 2-12 turns (slapping, etc. does not awaken; onset time is 1-2 rounds). Belthim strikes from hiding to whittle down a strong party. He does not rush in to face massed foes.

Naturally, the Worms have been watching Belthim, and patrols of Hands start to arrive if the PCs remove Mithilaer from her prison. The Hands seek to take everyone involved into custody: Belthim, Mithilaer, and the PCs.

Further Adventures

In the taverns, PCs willing to talk with the more drunken Zhentilar hear that there are "caches of magic all over the city, put there by the wizards...everywhere, they are—but ye daren't touch one; they'll get ye!"

Another piece of drunken advice: "Every pillar in this Bane-blessed city has a hidden door or shaft inside it."

Beware talkative drunks in Zhentil Keep; the Worms love to tease outlanders into dangerous behavior—both for entertainment and to demonstrate their own usefulness and importance to the ruling Zhentarim.

There are many caches and libraries of Art in Zhentil Keep. Almost all heavily-guarded with tricks, traps, and imprisoned creatures galore; they should offer (foolishly) persistent PCs an endless series of deadly challenges. The Zhentarim, of course, lie behind almost everything happening in Zhentil Keep. All PC activities attract their interest and ultimately bring PCs and the Black Network into open conflict—which can furnish PCs with endless adventures over years of play.

The treasure vaults of non-Zhentarim Lords and merchants, and the smelters and gem-cutters that supply the contents of such vaults, are all rich targets for PCs interested in plunder. All are heavily guarded. Beholders, dragons, and powerful priests reinforced by army units all can be hurled at PCs who really set their feet wrong in Zhentil Keep. A chase halfway across Faerun could well result, but only if the PCs have the sense to run before they are destroyed. PCs who agree to serve the Zhentarim with simple deed or service in exchange for their lives could live a little longer. Of course, after that deed is done, the PCs will be enemies of both the Zhentarim and their opponents.

Ah, well, few who visit Zhentil Keep are bored.

The Living Galaxy

Flora, Fauna, And The Alien Question

by Roger E. Moore

Imagine that a friend of yours is an alien from Tau Ceti II, and it asks you about nonhuman life on Earth. "Well," you say, pulling out a picture book on terrestrial life, "we've got lots of plants, like algae, grass, rose bushes, Venus' flytraps, and giant sequoias. And we've got animals, like protozoans, bombardier beetles, clams, frogs, bats, elephants, and whales. And . . . ."

You pause here because your alien friend is waving all of its tentacles at once. "How is this possible?" it bellows. "Doesn't all life on Earth look like you? Why is it all so different?"

You are about to laugh when you realize you are under the impression all other life on your friend's planet must look something like it—rubbery black with five tentacles and a radarlike visual organ in the middle of its three-horned head. After a little questioning, you learn that almost no other animal on its homeworld even vaguely resembles it, and a look through its homeworld's zoological guide reveals the wildlife there is just as strange and varied as on our Earth.

You're getting an idea of how difficult it is to generate a working ecology on a planet in a science fiction role playing game. It's a task for extremely dedicated Game Masters with large amounts of free time, which probably leaves out about 98% of the readership—me included.

What we'll do instead of learning to build a whole ecology is to pick out the bits that have a dramatic effect on a role playing scenario. You'll discover to your delight that you can hit the highlights, discard the rest, and no one will be the wiser but you and I.

Let's make some broad assumptions. We'll assume that most planets with native ecologies, no matter how life forms are constructed biochemically, have some equivalent to our immobile, sun-loving plants and mobile animals. We also assume there will be food pyramids as on Earth, with vast numbers of plants being fed upon by a moderate number of herbivores, and a small bunch of carnivores at the top of the food chain. This is reasonable, though you may want to fiddle with this arrangement for some off-the-wall worlds. We'll address other assumptions as they appear.

Note that we are not discussing the creation of *intelligent* alien life here. Jean is after me to cover that in a separate column, and most science fiction role playing games have their own detailed sentient alien races (though sometimes not much on their pets or their homeworlds' wildlife).

Despite the use of scientific principles and real-world examples, we aren't concerned so much with complete realism *except in ways that will enhance game play.* You want to design imaginative creatures and landscapes that are entertaining, not textbook dull. Still, you also want your creations to seem plausible and realistic—even if your

players have conservative imaginations.

A word of warning: Saying that someone has a conservative imagination is no slur. We are all like that. Almost no one can mentally juggle too many weird things at once; we rely on stereotypes and archetypes, the basic building blocks of information, to make sense out of the universe. We couldn't get out of bed in the morning otherwise. You, as the Game Master, can take advantage of this fact by making up things on other worlds that are strange, but not too strange. You want to *intrigue* your players, not scare them off.

Of course, you should always be free to make up the really wacky or dangerous critters for special occasions. But parcel out this "fun stuff" sparingly. All terrestrial life has a carbon-based biochemistry; scientists have debated, however, about ammonia-, methane-, fluorocarbon-, and silicon-based biochemistries for life on very cold or very hot worlds. (For more information, see Isaac Asimov's essay, "We, the In-Betweens," in his anthology, *Is Anyone There?* TSR's AMAZING® Stories had some columns recently on this topic; get the December 1992 and January, May, and June 1993 issues for Stephen Gillett's science columns. In fact, go through all of the AMAZING Stories magazines from 1991 to date and check out all the science columns—you'll be amazed at the stuff here you can use for a science fiction campaign.)

With weird biochemistries, you can build a world ecology with crystalline, amoeboid, plasma, or gas-bag life forms, living on sunbaked planets, in the clouds of gas giants like Jupiter, or elsewhere. Still, avoid going completely off the deep end by detailing bizarre life on every world in your universe. How could you ever run a campaign if every planet had wildlife so exotic that the Alien of movie fame is put to shame? How would you find the time to make all of that up, or even the time to describe a typical alien without your players falling asleep? You must be careful in your creativity if you want to share it with others.

Let's now examine some of the high points in ecology-building.

#1: Use Earthly Models

If you try to make every world's ecology unique, you will go mad. There are perfectly good reasons why some real-world biologists think alien life forms might follow the general patterns we see in living things here. Thus, alien grass could be bright yellow and sharp enough to cut you if you grab it, but in many ways it will still be a lot like grass.

Get a good book on our world's plant and animal life and note some basic principles. See how animals use camouflage, for one thing, and see what sorts of offensive and defensive weapons animals use (shells, claws, teeth, stingers, webs, etc.). Note some obvious points, such as the fact that fast-running beasts often have long, thin legs (whether they are dinosaurs or ostriches) and that swimming creatures are very streamlined and usually have fins (like ichthyosaurs, porpoises, and sharks). Make notes on less obvious points, too, such as the way some animals use mimicry to scare off attackers, how animals cool themselves in hot weather, or why some plants are carnivorous.

When inventing an alien animal or plant, don't be afraid to base it on a particular Earthly organism, with special changes and frills added. If you include an alien turtlelike beast, you can give it an infrared heat sensor on its forehead and make it spotted white on red, maybe even giving it six legs. But don't also give it wings and the ability to burp up flammable gas. As noted earlier, avoid making most of your wildlife too bizarre. You don't want every creature to look like a genetic nightmare, as this will harm believability and will make the world too bizarre and complex for any gamer to grasp comfortably.

#2: Design Only What You Need

You don't need to design plants and animals for parts of a world where characters are not likely to go. Unless you are designing a zoo for the PCs to visit, stick to creating the plants and animals where an adventure will take place. If the adventure is in a city, a brief note on the local equivalent of birds, insects, plants, and pets is all you'll probably need. If the adventure is in a mountainous wilderness, you can go into more detail. However, you don't need to design a planet's arctic ecology if the PCs will be visiting only the tropics. Obsessive GMs waste their time on minutiae and are paid back with player boredom.

#3: Paint The Background

In a forest, the first thing you notice are the trees. You might not pay attention to the difference between a pine and a cedar, or between a maple and an oak, but trees still form a necessary backdrop to your experiences in the woods. A GM need not say more than a sentence or two in describing a forest, but that bit of information is important in establishing the adventure setting in the players' minds. What's true for trees is also true for grass, flowers, insects, and other "background" wildlife.

To set up a basic ecology on a particular game world or in a major environmental region, first paint out the broad strokes of the local vegetation. Write down what sort of plants are the most common: trees, bushes, mosses, grass or other ground cover, etc. What color do these plants primarily share—green, blue-green, violet, red, brown, yellow, or something else? Do they have a distinctive smell: perfumed, acrid, musty and moldy, foul, sweet, or something else? Does the vegetation appear everywhere or only in clusters around water sources or rich soil?

Try to visualize the setting, even going so far as to sketch out landscapes with colored pencils or crayons in your spare time to get the proper view settled in your mind (you can use your sketches later to show your players what the area looks like).

We'll make up a planet named Varney IV and say it has a very Earthlike ecology, with the primary colors of the vegetation being sea green and yellow. Varney IV has one large continent, and plant life tends to cluster around freshwater rivers and lakes (the sea is very salty and has lots of harmful dissolved minerals in it).

When designing plant life, remember one short cut: You might get away with using examples of *real* Earth life. In many science fiction games, the ecologies of some worlds were directly transplanted from Earth during terraforming and colonization. Thus, one might find a grove of evergreens in an otherwise purple forest, or the whole world might look like it was picked up from an Ohio hardwood forest or Kansas wheat field (something like what happened to Mars in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*).

Little or nothing might remain of any previous life forms. This has the advantage of making such worlds very "homey" for humans (and easy for the GM to describe), though it does tend to

make such worlds a little boring if used too often in the game. Still, it's a very logical outcome of human expansion into the stars. Discovery of pockets of the original life forms—some potentially dangerous—might be an adventure in itself.

After plants, pick out a few (3-5 at most) animals that will be commonly found in that setting. There is no reason, barring world catastrophe, why any Earthlike planet shouldn't have the same sort of "life pyramid" that we have: uncounted trillions of microbes, billions of small creatures like insects and spiders, and fewer still of larger creatures like rabbits and reindeer, with only a handful of carnivores at the top of the food chain.

You're focusing in this section on relatively harmless animals that the adventurers will notice after a few minutes of looking or walking around. Thus, you can jot down that the area around one low-tech starport on Varney IV is crawling with blue-black, eight-legged antlike creatures that are harmless but get into everything; that some rabbits (escaped from colonists' pens) have adapted to eating the broad-leafed, pale-green "grass" and have multiplied everywhere; and that there are lots of bright red, fast-running critters that look like long-legged kiwis, which feed on the blue ants.

These "background" creatures won't show up in random-encounter tables for a region, because such creatures are simply too common or inoffensive to notice. You should certainly include them in general descriptions of the landscape to set a scene. Players might wish for their characters to investigate these critters, but they'll move on to other things before long.

#4: Add Dangerous Spice

So far, so good. Now pick out a small handful of creatures, flora and fauna, that are reasonably uncommon but also somewhat important to the adventurers for safety reasons. These could be carnivores dangerous to the PCs—local equivalents of bears, wolves, great cats, army ants, and so on. They might be "thieves" that steal equipment or herbivorous mimics that imitate carnivores to frighten off attackers, or have special abilities that will cause other sorts of problems. Whatever the reason, these beings are going to get the adventurers' attention quickly, and they could cause a lot of trouble in the process.

It shouldn't take long to figure out Earthly equivalents for "small problem" beasts, the kind likely to harass and annoy rather than rip victims to shreds. Such creatures need not look or act like miniature Godzillas.

Your friend from Tau Ceti, for instance, might decide to go for a walk on Earth but be attacked by a mother robin when the curious alien gets too close to a nest. The alien then steps on a small hill of fire ants, gets bitten by mosquitoes and stung by a wasp, and wanders through a patch of poison ivy immediately before meeting a skunk and a porcupine. The alien eats a mushroom that causes stomach cramps, then arrives back at your house being chased by a pack of small dogs, cursing your planet and its insanely dangerous life forms—ones to which you certainly wouldn't give a second thought most days. As the GM, you can add a few such creatures to keep the PCs on their toes and give them some amusing memories (entertaining for you, anyway!).

Here and there, of course, you should add in the *real* dangers. On Earth, we have black widow spiders, rattlesnakes, army ants, leopards, large wild dogs and wolves, killer bees, grizzly bears, boa constrictors, plague-bearing rats, alligators, lions, angry buffalo, stampeding cattle, and so on. You aren't likely to run into them often, for which you can be very grateful. Still, adventurers poke their noses into everything, and they're likely to meet some unfriendly animals before long.

I would suggest designing a particular area's encounter table with no more than six "problem" encounters, including both nuisance beasts and real dangers. (This way, you can roll 1d6 to get your critters, or roll 1d8 or 1d10 and make some creatures more likely to be met than others.) There's no point in tacking on additional "problem" creatures to the encounter list for a given area, as the place probably could not support that many dangerous animals and plants (this isn't fantasy, after all). Besides, once again, we want to share the biological wealth and leave nasty surprises for the PCs in other areas, too.

If you like "customized" encounter tables, you can add a situation or combined encounter to a particular result. On Earth, you might meet a bear getting honey from a tree swarming with angry bees. If the bear runs off, you are still stuck with the bees. You might also find an animal in a trap, several animals feeding on a kill, or locate the remains of a carnivore's meal shortly before you meet the creature itself. Use your imagination here to give each encounter a particular spin. It's the same idea GMs use in fantasy games to avoid the "just another orc" syndrome. How many ways are there to meet a bear? Make a few notes, then use them with your alien wildlife tables to give each encounter a lively twist.

On Varney IV, for instance, some large dogs have escaped and now feed on the rabbits and super-kiwis. Eating the tasty super-kiwis also gives the dogs hallucinations, so the PCs might encounter some dogs that act in a very strange manner—walking on their back legs, barking at nothing, chasing insects, etc.

A side note: An encounter table, of course, can include natural situations and "traps" as well as simple meetings with animals. In the proper regions, explorers might come across quicksand, tar pits, forest fires, deep mud, half-covered sinkholes, rockslides, avalanches, etc. If you add a few of these, adjust your encounter table for use with 1d10, 1d12, or 2d12 dice. I also strongly recommend developing a separate (but simple) weather table to take into account winds, hailstorms, fog, snow, and so forth, depending on the climate. Weather conditions might alter a wildlife encounter for the general good or bad of the PCs (you are unlikely to meet a swarm of bees in a downpour, but a bear will find it easier to chase you if you're running across wet and muddy ground).

#5: Poisonous Quirks

If we're going to be "realistic" about alien ecologies, there is an important point to make. It is entirely possible that some alien ecologies could be innately deadly to Earth life. An alien biochemistry might be in every way as poisonous to us as our life would be to those alien creatures; there are lots of organic, carbon-based natural venoms on Earth, after all.

Such worlds are unlikely to be colonized without extensive terraforming and the complete destruction of all life there—which might not solve anything, as the soil might contain poisons as well. Thus, there might be some worlds humans will skip over, though the planets look for all the galaxy like paradise (a "Star Trek" TV episode made use of this idea). Biological research bases staffed largely by robots might exist

there, but no large colonies.

Remember, too, the lesson of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*: Bacteria and viruses from Earth might create plagues of monstrous proportions on other worlds, just as their microbes might destroy us. Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain* covered this possibility. Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* has a similar event. Some worlds might be designated as off-limits because of such problems, though properly inoculated and space-suited humans or germ-free robots might be able to travel there without causing harm to themselves or the world.

Of course, some wildlife on otherwise habitable worlds might be dangerous to eat or touch because of biochemical reactions. Think about the little "arrow-venom" frogs in South America; natives rub arrowheads against the frogs' skins to get their deadly secretions. Locals on Varney IV might know not to pick up the little salamander-like creatures in the rivers, as they have poison spines that cause paralysis. Include critters and plants like these in your random-encounter tables.

#6. Imports and Exports

Wherever people go, they want help to do the work. That's why we have domestic animals like sheep, goats, cattle, horses, dogs, and (when they feel like it) cats. Picture, then, the variety of animal life from a dozen or even a few thousand alien worlds that we and other intelligent aliens will find uses for as pets, beasts of burden, guards, and so forth.

Domestic animals on newly colonized worlds will need to be imported from other planets like Earth, perhaps in embryo form to be grown to birth size in special tanks or other devices. Long-settled worlds can have native domestic beasts and might be able to export them to other needy worlds for a profit. You might think about making up a few tamed creatures to go with colonized worlds.

Domestic animals sometimes escape and run wild, further altering an environment that has probably been fiddled with since the colonists arrived. Wild animals can accidentally be introduced from world to world, too. Rats, mice, insects, and so forth—not to mention bacteria, parasites, and viruses—might be unintentionally locked in crates aboard starships and dropped off on other worlds. For example, rabbits didn't do Australia any good when they nearly overran the countryside. And Florida has had many problems with plants and animals from other countries that have taken over its waterways, like the famed "walking catfish."

Zoos might be vandalized, laboratories could be broken into, and shipments for other worlds might be stolen; all this could lead to new species popping up around the landscape.

Pick out a few species that might be carried around in this manner, and introduce them on a number of worlds that lie along the major trade routes of your campaign. No one may be able to say for sure how those @#%@$$%&*&!! blue ants from Varney IV got to Zeta Herculi B-3 (or into the adventurers' food locker), but now they're a part of the local legends.

#7. Use Alien Resources

There are a number of excellent references you can use in designing animals and plants for your worlds. Some of the best that I've found are noted here (in some cases, with my favorite beasts mentioned at the end).

- Dixon, Dougal. *After Man* and *The New Dinosaurs.* These are two outstanding books depicting imaginary world ecologies based on our Earth. *After Man* shows the variety of life on Earth 50 million years after humanity has become extinct. *The New Dinosaurs* shows how life might have evolved if the dinosaurs had not died out at the end of the Cretaceous period.

Both books give brief but detailed information on topics such as natural selection, animal behavior, environmental pressures and effects on evolution, food chains, climatic regions, and convergent evolution (the forces that make animals in similar ecological niches look alike, like the previously mentioned porpoises, ichthyosaurs, and sharks). Brilliantly colored paintings of these incredible creatures will leave you in awe. I knew a gamer who borrowed the *After Man* ecology whole for a fantasy campaign.

By all means, get copies of these books and learn all you can. My favorite: You can't beat the night stalker from *After Man,* which is so horrific it probably could kill its prey by fear alone. All of these animals are great.

- Peterson, Roger Troy. Peterson Field Guide Series. There are too many of these wonderful volumes to name, but they are gold mines of information about common Earthly life forms. Feel free to borrow ideas and animal models from them.
- Savage, R. J. G., and M. R. Long. *Mammal Evolution: An Illustrated Guide.* Of all the many books on prehistoric life on Earth, this remains one of my favorites. It traces the evolution of mammals from pre-dinosaur days to the current time, with an enormous number of sketches and full-color illustrations to make its points. It would be very easy to borrow some of these creatures and adapt them to your campaign on many different worlds; you won't run out of source material very soon! My favorite: It had to be the *Andrewsarchus,* a prehistoric hyaena-like monster that was the largest land carnivore of all time. Its jaws would have given a grizzly bear a heart attack.
- Street, Philip. *Animal Weapons.* The value of a book like this in your campaign is fairly obvious. This book gives detailed and highly interesting information on the natural offensive and defensive armament of animals. The tidbits are marvelous; I recall in particular the notes on the bolas spider, which makes its own bola with which to attack insects! Animal encounters will never be the same after you've read this text. (I strongly recommend, too, that you look up books on carnivorous plants—just a word to the wise, you understand.)
- Stümpke, Harald. *The Snouters: Form and Life of the Rhinogrades.* Some years ago, a zoology professor in Heidelberg invented a new branch of mammals that he named the rhinogrades—small animals that had incredibly developed noses, often usable as feet! His write-up of these creatures, allegedly from a Pacific island chain later destroyed by an atomic test, was a work of genius and imagination (the illustrations alone will leave you amazed).

Like Dougal Dixon's books, this one points out many details on biological forces such as adaptive radiation, evolution, and so forth—all material you can use in designing new creatures for your science fiction game worlds. The "snouters" are quite creative and have lots of features worth borrowing for your alien zoos. My favorite: There was one that looked like a gerbil with a long leaping foot growing from its nose. It looked cute as a pet, but I don't recall its name.

In addition, you should strongly consider looking through the many role playing references on fantastic

creatures. Those from fantasy games will probably need extensive modification to remove magical powers (unless you convert them to psionic powers used in your game, or unless your game allows magic) and to make them unrecognizably "new" (no one wants to meet a plain old umber hulk in an alien mine—it's too boring and out of place).

Some of the better gaming resources are the following, which can be mined for valuable material to convert to your own science fiction gaming system. I'd recommend getting all of them except for the *Creature Catalog,* no matter what science fiction role playing game you play. They appear in no particular order:

• *Monster Manual, Monster Manual II, FIEND FOLIO® Tome,* and *Monstrous Compendium* (all volumes), by many authors (TSR, Inc.). These, the cornerstones of the AD&D® game, make nice sources of ideas for strange alien creatures. As noted earlier, you might wish to rework some creatures to remove their fantasy flavor (especially any magical powers), and you could cut out the high intelligence some monsters were given to make them more animal-like and useful. The bad news is that many monsters (like dragons, humanoids, giants, undead, and outer-planes creatures) will be useless; use your discretion. If you're going to borrow fantasy-game monsters, you may as well look through POLYHEDRON® Newszine and DRAGON® Magazine, too. My favorites: green slime, cave fisher, shrieker, yellow musk creeper and other carnivorous plants, assorted bloblike "clean-up crew" monsters, and various snakes and lizards.

• *Creature Catalog,* by many authors (TSR, Inc.). The 1993 revision of the D&D® game's bestiary is a fair source of strange critters, though it has all the utility problems of the AD&D books (if not more, as many of the entries are intelligent). My favorites: amber lotus flower, decapus, giant serpentweed.

• *GURPS Space Bestiary*, by Chris McCubbin (Steve Jackson Games). This offers a nice, thick assortment of critters. Some may be too silly or "fantasyish" for your tastes, but even these can be twiddled with and made more acceptable. You'll recognize a few creatures as being adapted from other science fiction or fantasy sources. My favorites: sea blimp and blimp ape, trundler (serves as both a pet and extra furniture), dampster, and mansion tree.

• *Traveller Supplement 2: Animal Encounters* (Game Designers' Workshop). This is nice, as it offers the bare bones of a great many random-encounter tables for many different types of world environments (even a complete vacuum). You would need to copy each section and personalize it, as the old *Traveller* game's animal classification system was sparse and left much to the imagination (what does a "flying intermittent" or a "reducer" look like, anyway?). Still, the tables provide for each animal's frequency, weight, armor, attack types, and chances to flee or attack. It's a great take-off point for GMs with a lot of time on their hands, though it is long out of print.

• *Traveller Adventure 10: Safari Ship*, by Marc W. Miller, John Harshman, Loren Wiseman, and Tim Brown (Game Designers' Workshop). Another out-of-print but worthwhile book for the old *Traveller* game, this one details a hunting expedition that could be adapted to a number of other games (it even has plans for a safari-type starship). You could put all of your monster-creating talents to work with this one. A new sentient race is described in the book as well.

• *Paranormal Animals of North America*, by Nigel D. Findley (FASA Corporation). I really liked this compendium, as it seems to have few of the fantasy/magic problems that other references have. Lots of artwork (some in color) and highly creative details make this a very satisfying sourcebook. My favorites, among many others: behemoth, black annis, deathrattle, gabriel hound (nice!), mimic snake, snow snake. *Paranormal Animals of Europe* (by Carl Sargent) is also out, but I haven't seen it yet.

• *S. Petersen's Field Guide to Cthulhu Monsters*, by Sandy Petersen, Tom Sullivan, Lynn Willis, et al. (Chaosium, Inc.). Oh, my! This *Call of Cthulhu* reference book is marvelous, but players will ***kill*** you if they discover you've been borrowing critters from it to litter their adventures. Some of these monsters would make nice intelligent—if obscenely grotesque—sentient aliens (I'd love to see a variant alien race of ghouls, for instance). I can't recommend you add things like Azathoth or other Great Old Ones to the campaign, of course, but this is still a lot of fun for all science fiction game GMs. My favorites: chthonian, dark young, dhole, formless spawn, servitor, shoggoth—I can't go on. This is too cruel.*

• *S. Petersen's Field Guide to Creatures of the Dreamlands*, by Sandy Petersen, Mark J. Ferrari, Lynn Willis, and Tom Sullivan (Chaosium, Inc.). *Oh, my!* This book is even better than the other Cthulhu field guide! The very thought that some naive adventurers might run into a leng spider's traps or a large group of wamps nearly brought tears of joy to my eyes. Again, any GM using this book had better have some good insurance coverage in case the players find out. My favorites: blupe, buopoth (note the snouter illo, borrowed from Stümpke's book, mentioned earlier), haemophore, leng spider (oh, boy!), magah bird, wamp (yes!), and zoog.

Next month—who knows. I have a dozen different ideas but haven't settled on any of them. See you then!

* As a GM, I once had a shoggoth escape from a zoological crate aboard a *Traveller* starship, and it took a crew armed with plasma guns and a barbarian in powered armor to finally kill it. The starship was a wreck. I was so happy I could have wept. Promise me you'll try this on your group.

Gadgets Galore

A Bevy Of Useful Items For Science Fiction Games

A Network clubs contest to design interesting items for science fiction role playing games yielded a mountain of entries. The best are presented here.

MUTANT DETECTOR, Paranoia
by Brett Bakke

The mutant detector is a recent breakthrough from R&D. It is a set of goggles with a self-generating laser beam that shoots unerringly at mutants. It takes 30 seconds to don or remove the goggles. Once on, the goggles fire at the first mutant within range. The mutant detector works in two directions—forward (the line of sight of the wearer) and backward (toward the wearer).

If the closest mutant is the wearer, the goggles start to spin the wearer about, trying to get the wearer to look at himself. Next, if the goggles fail to make the wearer look at himself, they start beeping and indicate they will self-destruct in 30 seconds, 29 seconds, 28 seconds, etc., down to 10 seconds. At this point they state, "Why wait any longer? You're a traitor anyway," and blow up. This should occur just before the wearer is able to remove them.

JOY BUTTON, Paranoia
by Brett Bakke

A joy button is a one-inch in diameter, official "The Computer Is Your Friend" button. These buttons are secretly made and distributed by the Free Enterprisers, although almost everyone assumes they are official computer issue. When wearing these buttons, the character adds 4 to his bootlicking and spurious logic scores (the bonus to spurious logic only applies if The Computer or a robot can actually see the PC who is attempting the roll).

CLIMBING GLOVES, Paranoia
by Timothy Parker

These are a new innovation from the fetid, fertile mind of Albert-I-STN-4, darling of STN Sector R&D. These thin, stout leather gloves have a second layer of thicker leather over the back of the hand and a narrow steel band around the wrist. The steel bands contain miraculously tiny motors, a sturdy little grappling hook with telescoping claws, and 20 meters of thin, but strong, cable.

To activate them, the wearer must swing his arm as though he were hurling a grappling hook. This action causes a miniature rocket, side-mounted on the hook, to fire and send the hook and cord on their way. As soon as the grappling hook makes contact, its claws telescope out, thereby securing the grip.

After a five-minute delay, in which the wearer is expected to make sure he has a secure grip, the motors activate, hauling the wearer up. The cable automatically rewinds as this movement takes place, and a small panel can be pressed to retract the hook into its niche and reset the rocket. Each glove can haul up to 120 kg of weight, and they can be used in concert to double the weight carried.

The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Or, if you like, the more complicated the gadget, the greater the chance that it will malfunction. These are some of the problems awaiting some dumb clone who uses the gloves:

1. The rocket malfunctions, blowing the wearer's hands off.

2. The rocket malfunctions, or prefires, sending the hook (with its telescoping claws for great damage ratings) into a wall, briefing officer, Vulture Squadron Guard, fellow Troubleshooter, or whatever.

3. The claws fail to open, and the hook cannot grip (boring, but possible).

4. The motor burns out, leaving a clone stranded halfway up a cliff.

5. The sturdy cable proves to be not so sturdy after all, snapping, of course, at the worst possible time.

6. The cable acts like a yo-yo retracting and extending with the Troubleshooter attached.

IMPROVED HYGIENBOT, Paranoia
by David J. Radzik

A clean citizen is a healthy citizen.

Research & Design developed a new bot to deal with the reported rise in poor hygiene. As requested by The Computer, this hygienbot assists citizens in resisting the Communists' subversive plot to reduce all loyal Alpha Complex citizens to being mere unwashed masses. Traitorous elements wish to weaken loyal citizens by introducing Communist diseases to Alpha Complex. These diseases are easily prevented by the properly followed hygiene doctrines given to us by the Computer. Citizens failing to follow proper hygiene should be reported to the Housing Preservation & Development and Mind Control Administration for proper reeducation.

Improved Hygienbot: The hygienbot is a three-wheeled, propane powered (24 hour supply), barber's chair with a multi-functional cosmetics module. Audio and color video sensors allow the bot to assist citizens to obtain a healthy and aesthetic appearance. A voice synthesizer provides friendly conversation with the user. The hygienbot also has a chemosensor that enables it to seek out citizens failing to maintain required hygiene.

Filthy or odorous citizens are placed in the chair. Reluctant citizens are grappled and shackled down. The hygienbot applies needed implements until proper hygiene has been obtained. Some models have incorrect programming and will often start treatment with a random application of implements.

Unfortunate run-ins with these bots have ended in injuries and fatalities. Investigating troubleshooters report that these instances are a result of Communist tampering.

Each bot has 1-10 implements.

Bot Implements

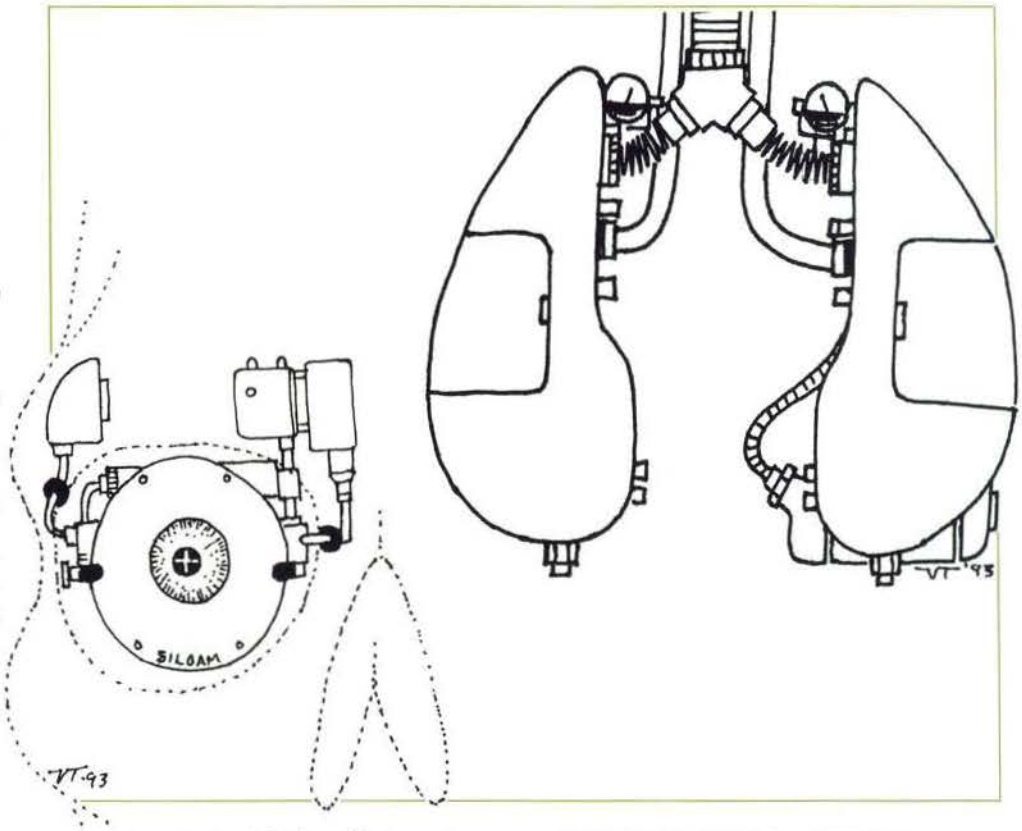
1	Soap and water nozzle
2	Black hair dye nozzle
3	Hair remover paste
4	Red hair dye nozzle
5	Comb and brush
6	Hair dryer
7	Toenail remover
8	Razor and scissors
9	Manicure tools
10	Hair curlers
11	Blue hair dye nozzle
12	Plastiment concrete
13	Meat tenderizer
14	Flame thrower
15	Circular saw
16	Vise clamp
17	Power sander
18	Clown make-up
19	Corrosive cleanser
20	Motor oil

VIDGAM DECK, Shadowrun
by Brett Bakke

The vidgam deck is a new decking device. Any program that could be run by a decker can be run by the vidgam deck with only a bit of outside guidance. The non-decker who controls the vidgam uses one of a variety of interfaces—a joystick, keyboard, or even a voice command interpreter on the most advanced models—to tell the vidgam deck what he or she wants done.

The process is considered slow, clumsy, and ineffective by most deckers. Vidgam decks are currently only available with decking levels 1-4, although higher levels are rumored to be coming out soon. All of the vidgam's target numbers are at +3, modified downward by one to a minimum of +1 for each successful quickness check (target number of 4). This check simulates the problems inherent in the awkward interface between the vidgam deck and the user.

Cost for vidgam decks are 50,000 Nuyen for level 1; 200,000 for level 2; 500,000 for level 3; and 3,000,000 for level 4.



DISTANCE DECK, Shadowrun
by Brett Bakke

Distance decks, or DDs, have been around for a while, but have been kept secret by the corps and various governments around the world. DDs are decks split into two parts, with extensive radio equipment attached. One part, the basebox, stays home with the decker, who plugs into the deck. The second part, dubbed the yellow squealer after a type of phone-tampering device used early in the computer era, is carried by runners who need a decker with them, but are going places no decker wants to go.

The runners plug the yellow squealer into the interface where the decker would normally hook up, and the squealer then scrambles and broadcasts the terminal's signals to the basebox, which is with the decker at home. The decker decks through the basebox, which broadcasts the signals back to the yellow squealer and into the matrix. The response time is slowed a bit by radio relay, so all the decker's target numbers are at +2.

DDs are hard to come by and require significant power amplifiers to keep the signal clean through the airways. The base cost for distance decks is 10 times the cost of the equivalent level normal deck. A character with a good black market contact might be able to get a DD for half this price.

BREATH OF GOD—CYBER-LUNG ENHANCEMENT, Torg Cyberpapacy
by Eric Lazarian

Designed to provide protection from harmful gasses, these artificial lungs were created for those on the front lines of Malraux's covert operations. They have internal replaceable filters which screen out poison gasses, sleep gasses, and noxious fumes. They allow the bearer to operate in low oxygen and low pressure environments, such as mountainous areas. The bearer can also choose to have high pressure replaceable oxygen containers inside the upper body or in place of the appendix which allows temporary operation in oxygen-deprived environments.

External attachments are also available for quick in-field replacement. The air supply has a two-hour limit.

The enhancement allows a +2 bonus to the running skill and reduces all fatigue effects by one shock point. The surgery difficulty to install these lungs is 12, its effect is Heavy, Cyber Rating +3, and its cost is 25,000.

JONAH'S GILLS—CYBER-LUNG ENHANCEMENT, Torg Cyberpapacy
by Eric Lazarian

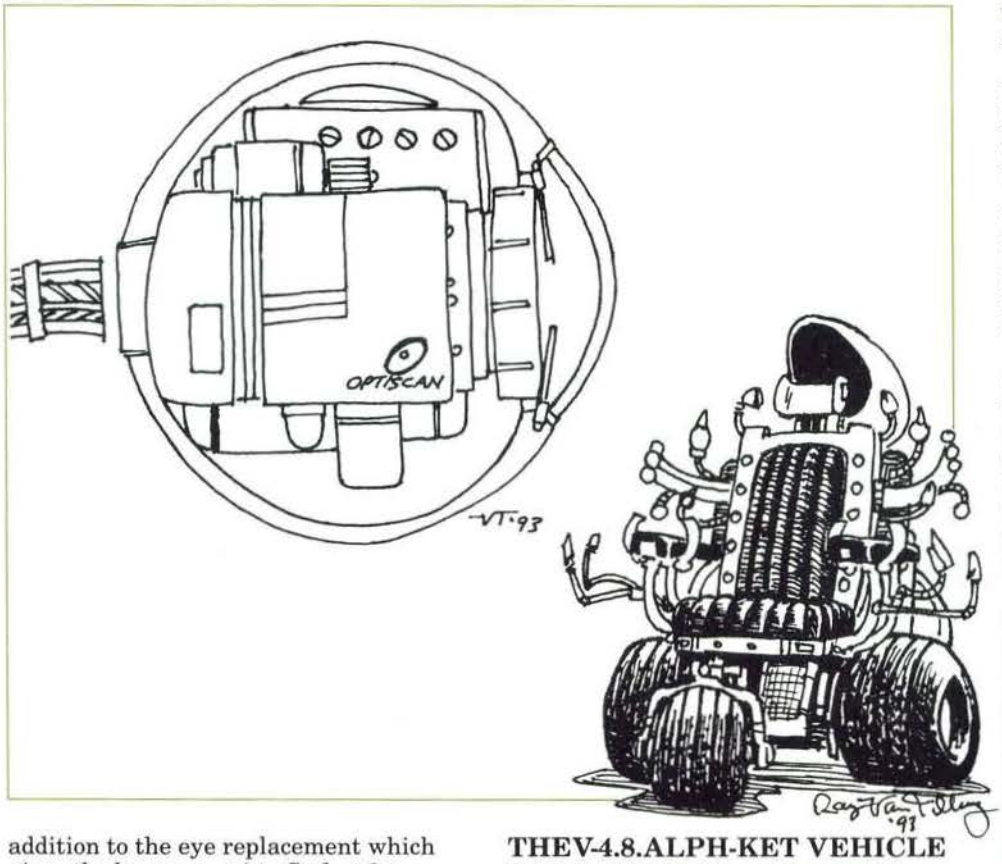
This device extracts oxygen from water, allowing the bearer to function in normal diving depths. The surgery difficulty is 10, its effect is Wound, Cyber Rating +3, and its cost is 18,000.

POIROT'S OPTISCAN—CYBEREYE ENHANCEMENT, Torg Cyberpapacy
by Eric Lazarian

This unique cyber item is implanted in individuals who have an investigative role in the hierarchy, such as high-ranking church police, cardinals who also have general inspector's ranks and Hospitallers on special assignment.

Poirot's optiscans give the bearer vision in both the ultraviolet and the infrared spectrums. A combination of built-in analysis software and special detectors give the bearer quick access to information on radiation sources, heat traces, and particle emissions. It also allows the bearer to operate in complete darkness and to resist flash grenade effects.

The optiscan includes a chip-holder, in



addition to the eye replacement which gives the bearer a +4 to find, +3 to evidence analysis and to science, metallurgy, chemistry, material science, optics, and physics: radiation and waveform analysis.

The optiscan insertion has a surgery difficulty of 8, an effect of Wound, Cyber Rating of +3, and costs 15,000.

EYE OF SILOAM—CYBEREYE ENHANCEMENT, Torg Cyberpapacy
by Eric Lazarian

This device gives the bearer telescopic and microscopic vision. In "binocular" mode, it gives magnifications of up to 100X and will also act as a range-finder. In "microscope" mode, it gives up to 50X magnification. It will operate in low-light conditions and is compatible with most cyber-eyes. It gives the bearer +2 in evidence analysis, +3 to find, and +4 to fire combat, energy weapons, and missile weapons at ranges greater than 20 meters. Installation has a surgery difficulty of 8, an effect of Wound, a Cyber Rating of +2, and costs 12,000.

THEV-4.8.ALPH-KET VEHICLE INTERFACE, Torg Tharkold
by Dave Wetzel

Scale: small
SyntheCyclers: Hydrocarbon, Metal
Makermods: Cybernetics, Electronics, Machining, Plastics

This pattern is a pre-production test of a device to install a cybernetic interface on a pre-cybernetics technology vehicle. When the Race decided to follow the techno-demons into Los Angeles, they wanted to send along some of their vehicle specialists. Unfortunately, their best pilots and drivers were trained to drive cybernetically-interfaced vehicles. For their benefit, the Race developed this device.

Regrettably, the device was not well tested and often suffers breakdowns. It should be treated as a faulty cybernetic system (failing on a 1 or 2). The GM is encouraged to have the device fail when a Setback occurs.

The interface can be installed in any land, sea, or air vehicle with a tech level of 23 or better. Installation of the interface requires a cybertech roll against a difficulty of 12. A modifier is applied based on the tech level of the vehicle. Subtract the vehicle's tech level from 26 and use that as a negative modifier to the roll.

KARAOKE MACHINE OF DEATH, Torg Nippon Tech/ Orrorsh
by John Terra

The phenomenon of Karaoke, which involves customers in bars singing along with recordings of popular hits, has been twisted into a weapon in the Possibility Wars.

A Nippon Tech electronics specialist, during his travels to Southeast Asia, went mad as a result of contact with an Orrorshan horror. His fevered brain came up with this horrible device (Tech Level 24) to spread fear and death into the lives of people who were most vulnerable, namely those who were relaxing in bars and clubs.

When an unwitting singer uses the microphone, the machinery mixes in a subliminal horror message, which acts as an Intimidation attack on the audience (strength 20). Instead of using the Interaction Table, consult the General Results Table. Note that results are cumulative. On an Average result, the audience is filled with dread, and most will have nightmares that night. On a Good result, the audience stampedes out of the club. On a Superior result, the urge to stampede is so strong that people are trampled and killed. On a Spectacular result, six people in the audience die of brain hemorrhages, with many gruesome manifestations.

The singer is affected differently. On a Good or Superior result, the singer is hypnotized into thinking that the audience is still in the club, and continues to sing for a number of hours equal to 20 minus the singer's Mind. On a Spectacular result, the singer actually stops singing once the audience leaves.

ENVIRO WEAVE, Cyberpunk
David W. Baker

Enviro weave was developed by Arasaka Corporation in 2012 for soldiers of various allegiances who would be forced to operate in extreme temperatures. It is a vast network of tubing, implanted just under the epidermis, through which a saline solution circulates. A small box, normally attached to the hip, monitors the temperature of the liquid. The liquid keeps the body temperature within certain specified norms. A person with enviro weave implanted can comfortably exist, without clothing, in tem-

peratures ranging from 10 to 45 degrees C. With protective clothing, more extreme temperatures can be withstood.

The enviro weave monitor can sense a decrease in the amount of liquid. If it determines that there is a leak, the system automatically shuts down and dumps the saline. However, leaks are uncommon, because the plastic used for the tubing is resilient and can self-close even severe tears.

Surgery: Major Cost: 1000 eb

COBRA SPITTER, Cyberpunk
by David W. Baker

These implants were developed by a demented ripperdoc at the request of a poser gang that wished to be like snakes. A small bladder is mounted on either cheek and is filled with a special poison. At will, the bladders can be forcibly contracted, spewing the contents from the person's mouth, out to a distance of 10 yards.

The poison is tailored to the individual's biochemistry so it will not injure him. The poison is generally a death contact poison, causing 4d6 damage. Some unscrupulous ripperdocs design the poison so that while the individual using the bladders is immune, he becomes addicted to the substance. This guarantees repeat customers.

Small tubes extend from the bladders to just below the jaw bone on the neck. From there, more poison can be injected to resupply the bladders. The bladders contain enough poison for three attacks.

Surgery: Minor Cost: 250 eb
poison 800 eb/3 doses

BIOTOX ANALYZER, Cyberpunk
by David W. Baker

This small device is usually implanted sub-dermally on the forearm. It discretely samples the individual's blood and detects the most minute amount of toxic substances. When such a substance is detected, the individual is warned through a speech synthesizer and small speaker that is also placed just under the skin. The chemical, its class, and effective methods of treatment are given to the individual.

Surgery: Minor Cost: 350 eb

RADIO PLUGS, Cyberpunk
by David W. Baker

These specially designed adapters fit any normal set of interface plugs. One pair of adapters is inserted into the individual's implanted interface plugs, while the other pair is inserted into the item to be linked to. A small switch on the radio plugs activates them, and a radio link is established, relieving the need for interface cables. The link has a range of up to two meters.

Each set of plugs uses a discrete frequency, thus multiple radio plugs will not interfere with each other. There is no degradation in transmission speed. However, the signal can be interrupted when in the presence of a very high electromagnetic field, on the range of 10,000 Tesla.

Cost: 200 eb

GALVDETECTOR, Cyberpunk
by David W. Baker

This slender device detects the galvanic skin response of an individual. It is usually implanted sub-dermally on the back side of the forearm, with detecting electrodes running to the thumb and forefinger. Information is either displayed on a sub-dermal LED, or to a Times Square Marquee.

The resistance of a person's skin changes slightly due to changes in emotional states. When the individual's skin is grasped by the two detectors in the thumb and forefinger, these changes can be detected. This effectively gives a person a +1 bonus when using interrogation, intimidate, and interview skills.

Surgery: Minor Cost: 200 eb

TACHYON HYPERBLASTER, Spacemaster
by Mark McPherson

Fabritech Systems has just released its new line of high energy infantry assault weapons. A breakthrough in miniaturized, high energy containment systems has led to the development of the tachyon hyperblaster. The T-blaster is superior to the plasma repeater rifle because personal defense screens are useless against it. The sub-atomic particles in the tachyon stream pass through even the most sophisticated force fields. The T-blaster currently comes in two versions, but Fabritech has plans to produce a line of heavy vehicular and shipboard versions.

Tachyon hyperblaster—Rifle Version: TH-1

The dimensions are identical to that of the plasma repeater rifle. Attacks are made as a Blaster Mk 5 with an Offensive Bonus of +120.

Concussion damage is ×2.

E impact and E radiation crits delivered upon a successful hit.

Note: Personal screens are ineffective against this weapon.

Cost: 750 Elmonits.

Powered by a micro-fusion reactor.

Tachyon hyperblaster—Infantry Support Version: TH-2

A tripod or vehicle mounting is required for this model.

Dimensions: 2.5 m × 25 cm tapering to a 3 cm diameter.

Weight: 250 kg.

Attacks are made as a Blaster Mk 5 with an Offensive Bonus of +250.

Concussion Damage is ×4.

2× E Impact and 3× E Radiation crits delivered upon a successful hit and Blast radius of 4 m delivering E Heat crits to those within the area of effect.

Personal Screens are also ineffective against this weapon.

Cost: 40,000 Elmonits.

Powered by a micro-fusion reactor or vehicle power plant.

APDAFF, Spacemaster
by Mark McPherson

As an additional incentive to purchase their new tachyon hyperblaster weapons, Fabritech has come up with a defense screen especially designed to resist blasts from plasma repeater rifles.

The technology is called APDAFF or Accelerator Plasma Damper Feedback Field. Fabritech has refined and miniaturized the equipment where APDAFF is now available in a belt-mounted personal screen generator. The generator combines the features of a powerful inertia dampening and phased electromagnetic dissipation field along with the APDAFF.

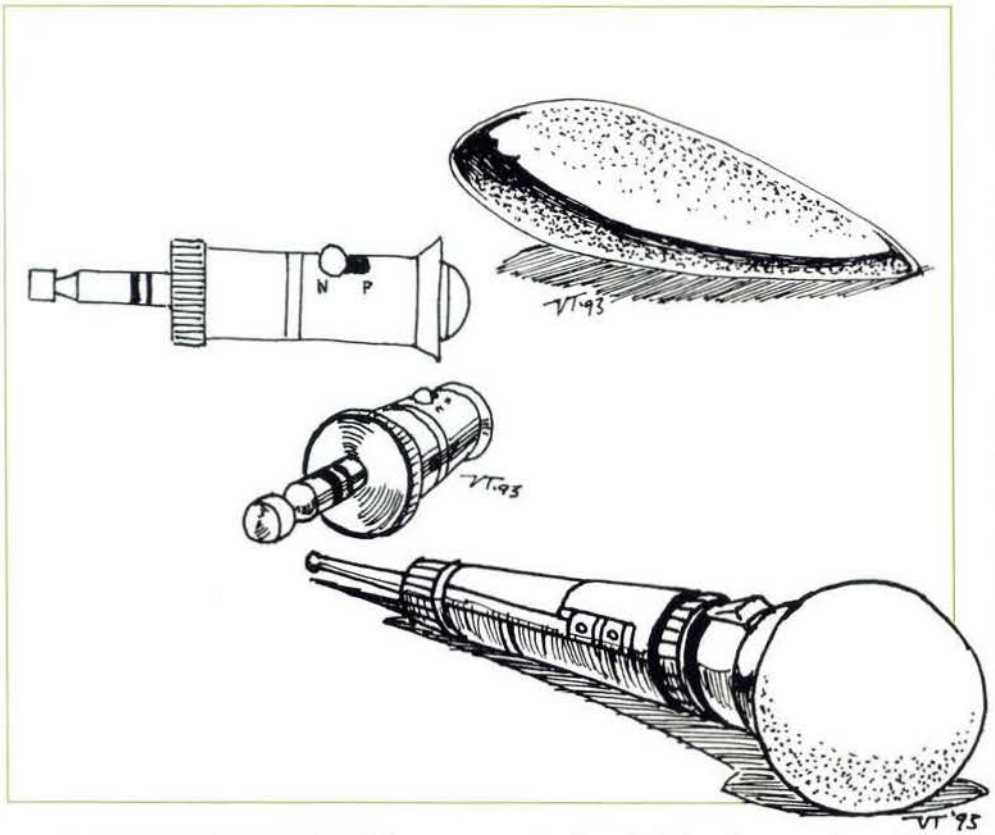
The APDAFF or Accelerator Plasma Damper Feedback Field:

Belt unit is 2 kg, 20 cm × 5 cm × 6 cm.

Energy Cell Requirements: 2 cells (Duration: 100 hrs).

The shield affords a DB addition of +40 versus physical projectiles and melee weapons and +50 versus energy weapons except the energy blasts of a plasma repeater rifle, against which the shield provides a DB addition of +150.

Cost: 17,000 Elmonits.



ANTI-GLITTER GRENADE, Spacemaster
by Mark McPherson

It is annoying when someone tosses a glitter grenade into the midst of a perfectly good firefight. But Fabritech has the answer. Fabritech has come up with yet another masterful piece of battlefield technology to shock the enemy—the anti-glitter grenade. This little gadget negates the effect of a glitter grenade when detonated in the same area. The area of effect is slightly larger than that of a standard glitter grenade, therefore pinpoint accuracy is not required.

The AG grenade deploys a burst of charged ions which adhere to the glitter particles produced by a glitter grenade. The ions form a heavy vapor which falls to ground and exists for a short while (1-2 minutes) as a low-lying mist before evaporating.

Weight: 0.5 kg.

Cost: 160 Elmonits/grenade.

THE LASER RE-DIRECTOR SHIELD, Spacemaster
by Mark McPherson

Fabritech also produces the latest technology for hi-tech gladiators who enjoy a little danger when they work.

For those battles where a prolonged firefight earns more credibility than a quick kill, the designers at Fabritech have created a hand-held personal laser blast deflector that increases the innocent bystander fatality rate by at least 50%.

The laser re-director shield is a 65 cm × 42 cm inverted teardrop shaped plate of highly polished hyper-steel alloy. The wearer straps the shield to the forearm using Kevlar polycro braces. This arrangement leaves the wearer's arms free.

To use the shield, the wearer turns the shield toward any laser fire that comes his way. This requires some skill, but any warrior experienced in armor maneuvering should find no difficulty with employing this device.

Note: Characters wearing non-powered armor with an armor type rating of 16 or above suffer penalty of −10 to moving maneuvers. This penalty is offset by increasing one's skill in maneuvering in armor to account for the extra bulk of the shield.

Unarmored shield users suffer a −5 penalty to moving maneuvers which can again be offset by taking additional skill levels in no-armor maneuvering.

The LR shield provides a DB addition of +100 versus laser attacks only. Physical projectiles are only penalized by +10 and melee attacks at +15. Other energy weapons suffer only a 30 point penalty (that is, a 30 DB addition), and any energy attacks that miss by 30 or less have a 60% chance of destroying the shield.

Laser attacks that miss by 60 or less have a 35% chance (modified by −5 per range category after Medium) of being reflected directly back on the attacker at the original combat roll, with a −60 OB penalty applied.

Weight: 4 kg.

Cost: 1000 Elmonits.

LIGHT-SHIELD OF THE JEDI, Star Wars
by Eric Lazarian

Used by young Jedi in training and by some Jedi Knights, this device uses some of the same principles as the Jedi lightsaber. It is built in the shape of an arm bracer and is worn on the arm opposite the lightsaber arm. It can be activated instantaneously.

When in use, the energy shield looks like a glowing, semi-translucent buckler projecting from a spherical node on the bracer. It can be adjusted to varying sizes, from 0.3 to 1.1 meters in diameter. Depending on the skill of the Jedi's craftsmanship, the shield also can be configured in multiple shape modes, of surface areas of up to 1.5 square meters.

The shield provides a bonus of 1D to the Jedi's Sense code (for lightsaber combat purposes only). Further, the shield provides a 2D bonus when the Jedi is using the absorption/dissipation skill.

GLITTER BALL, GAMMA WORLD® game
by Richard Rosado

Category:	Common Artifact Armor
Tech Level:	V
Duration:	1 minute
Avg. Cost:	10 domars
Weight:	N/A

These items appear to be sparkling globes the size of golf balls. When thrown to the ground, they burst and fill a three-meter hemisphere with glittering material.

The uneducated use glitter balls for entertainment; however, their real purpose is to disrupt laser and maser attacks. When a beam from one of these weapons enters the cloud, some if its energy is scattered, reducing damage by 2d6. It is not possible to re-use the sparkling residue.

Into The Dark

Night of the Blockbusters

by James Lowder

We conclude our "night of the" marathon this month, though I could run for at least two more issues on this topic—that is, if I could find the films. It's becoming harder and harder to rent obscure titles like *Night of the Howling Beast, Night of the Laughing Dead,* or *Night of the Cobra Woman* (filmed in Slitherama).

A large part of the blame for this problem can be laid on the corporate doorstep of a certain national video rental chain. These generic megastores seem to multiply faster than the giant bunnies in *Night of the Lepus,* driving smaller video outlets into ruin. I'm all for the free enterprise system, mind you, but the smaller stores are far more likely to carry older, less mainstream films—especially fantasy and horror titles—or movies that stir up even the least bit of controversy. The chains can't—or won't—carry such films because they might offend part of their huge clientele.

So the moral of the story is: unless you're happy renting only the latest slick-packaged blockbusters, support your local non-chain outlet. End of public service announcement.

As usual, the films reviewed here are rated as follows:

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

Night of the Ghouls

1960, 69 Minutes
Crown International
Director: Edward Wood, Jr.
Cast: Duke Moore, Kenne Duncan, Tor Johnson, Criswell
***1/2**

This is the third in a loose trilogy of horror/science fiction films by the infamous Ed Wood. You've undoubtedly heard of the first two flicks in the series: *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and *Bride of the Monster.* While *Night of the Ghouls* isn't as quirky as those two classics of "bad cinema," it's just strange enough to be mildly entertaining.

Police detective Bradford (Duke Moore) begins an investigation of strange goings-on at the house on Willows Lake—the site of Bela Lugosi's monster factory in *Bride of the Monster.* In the old spook house, rebuilt since the previous film, a fake medium named Dr. Acula (Kenne Duncan) holds rigged seances intended to bilk old folks out of their life savings. Sounds like a standard plot for *Scooby-Do,* right? But wait! Could it be that Dr. Acula can really contact the dead? Are there really ghosts haunting the grounds of the creepy old house?

In the end, the plot really matters little, since there isn't a single real scare or clever twist in the entire film. The entertainment value here resides solely in the oddball cast and shoestring filmmaking.

Some of the famous Ed Wood players get screen time: the psychic Criswell as the narrator; ex-Swedish wrestler Tor Johnson as the brutish Lobo; Paul Marco as Kelton the cop. The dialogue is amazingly stilted ("Oh, it was a nightmare of horrors!"), and the special effects on a level with the average grade-school haunted house.

Like all of Wood's films, though, *Night of the Ghouls* manages to remain somewhat intriguing despite its obvious and myriad shortcomings. Perhaps the film's sheer amateurishness bludgeons the audience into submission. I like to think Wood's enthusiasm for the project makes up for its flaws—well, a few of them anyway.

Night of the Ghouls was originally titled *Revenge of the Dead,* but money problems prevented Wood from releasing the film when it was first completed. When the movie was resurrected for video, it was given its current, Romero-style title.

To learn more about Ed Wood, check out Rudolph Grey's recent biography, *Nightmare of Ecstasy* from Feral House; the book, a compilation of quotes from folks who knew the director, is nearly as quirky as one of Wood's films. Also, Tim Burton is reportedly developing an Ed Wood bio-pic with Johnny Depp as Wood and Martin Landau as Bela Lugosi. Hoo ha! What more could you ask for?

Night of the Comet

1984, 94 Minutes
Atlantic Releasing/CBS-Fox
Director: Tom Eberhardt
Cast: Robert Beltran, Catherine Mary Stewart, Kelli Maroney, Mary Woronov
***

This sort-of SF spoof borrows heavily from the classic *Day of the Triffids,* George Romero's Living Dead flicks, and Richard Matheson's outstanding novel, *I Am Legend*—which was filmed directly as *The Omega Man* with Charlton Heston and *The Last Man on Earth* with Vincent Price.

In this derivative tale, a comet passes close to Earth. Folks celebrate the unusual event with parties, but they are rudely surprised when the passing ball of space gas reduces anyone standing in the open to a pile of ash. Partial exposure creates scarred, extremely violent zombie-types. Only a few people, shielded completely from the comet, survive the apocalypse unfazed. Two of these survivors, a pair of sisters, must battle zombies and boredom in a Los Angeles emptied by the comet-borne plague.

The first half of *Night of the Comet* drags, with endless driving sequences and long, dull shots of the LA skyline through an orange-brown filter. Oh, the sisters are interesting enough characters, portrayed well by Catherine Mary Stewart and Kelli Maroney, but the story doesn't seem to lead anywhere. Fortunately, midway through, a new subplot wanders into the film, wherein the girls encounter a nefarious group of scientists searching for a cure for the comet plague.

There are a couple of chilling moments in the film—most notably a dream sequence and an encounter with some punk zombies at a mall. The rest of *Night of the Comet* remains snuggled safely in a blanket of weak social satire, muffling its potential and dooming it to be little more than a pleasant enough way to spend an hour and a half. A feeble fate indeed.

Night of the Creeps

1984, 95 Minutes
Tri-Star/HBO
Director: Fred Dekker
Cast: Jason Lively, Jill Whitlow, Tom Atkins
*****1/2**

"The good news is: your dates are here. The bad news is: they're dead!"

From the director of *The Monster Squad* comes this odd little flick about alien slugs that turn the inhabitants of a college town into shuffling, glassy-eyed zombies (No, the slugs aren't Freshman Composition TAs). The only thing standing between the frat-rat infested town and the slithering brain leeches are a trio of unlikely heroes, led by nerdy Chris (Jason Lively). Together they battle the slugs and the zombies, a war that culminates in a flame thrower battle at a sorority on the night of the school formal.

While the derivative premise is sound enough, the script staggers like one of the slug-infested preppies; the dialogue is simply awful in places, and much of the humor misfires. Still, *Night of the Creeps* manages to entertain if you aren't expecting too much—thanks largely to Tom Atkins's performance as a campy hard-boiled detective who can't get over the murder of his sweetheart in 1959.

The film tips its hat to lots of classic B-grade horror/SF films, including *The Blob* and *Plan 9 from Outer Space.* (The second of the film's two prologues is even in black & white). The soundtrack sports tracks from ex-Go Go's guitarist/singer Jane Wiedlin and former Wall of Voodoo front-man Stan Ridgeway.

"What is this, a homicide or a bad B-movie?" As a matter of fact, you're right on both counts, Detective Cameron.

Night of the Zombies

1981, 101 Minutes
MPM/Vestron
Director: Vincent Dawn
Cast: Frank Garfield, Margit Newton, Selan Karay
1/2

When the inept scientists at Hope Center I allow radiation and/or toxic gas to escape from their labs, a plague of mad cannibals descends upon New Guinea. A special military squad is dispatched to investigate. Throw in a couple of reporters and a typical family, who all happen to be bopping around the island, and you've got the basis for *Night of the Zombies.*

The resulting film is one of the most tedious pieces of junk I've ever had to endure. The "heroes" are unlikable and unbearably stupid. They figure out early on that the only way to stop the zombies is to shoot them in the head. Too bad the highly trained soldiers seem to forget that vital bit of information every time one of the stumbling dead appears! Maybe they just like blasting away with their automatic weapons, or shouting lines like: "Come and get it, you rotten, wormy, putrid corpses!" Pure poetry.

Night of the Zombies also treats us to endless, badly edited documentary footage dredged up from the stock vault. The padding slows the action down to a snail's pace in the second hour, though it does provide a few unintentional laughs (as when the ultra-rare New Guinea elephant makes its appearance). Gore hounds might want to fast forward to the final battle, where we are subjected to some disgusting, badly done splatter scenes. All others will want to eschew the last few minutes.

Hack director Bruno Mattei hid behind the directoral pseudonym Vincent Dawn for the US release of this whopping great honker. The Spanish-Italian production is also known as *Apocalipsis Canibal, Hell of the Living Dead, Zombie Creeping Flesh,* and *Virus, Inferno Dei Morti-Viventi.* It was part of a wave of Italian zombie films produced to cash in on Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* and features a score by the Goblins, whose music is featured in many gut-munchers. This Mattei flick shouldn't be confused with the other 1981 *Night of the Zombies,* which deals with cannibalistic Nazi zombies.

In the final act, the heroes discover a message recorded by the leader of the Hope Center, apologizing for their blunder: "May God forgive us for what we have produced here, and pardon us for this evil we have created." Director Mattei should tack a message like this onto each copy of this mind-numbing flick. After watching *Night of the Zombies,* though, I doubt very much anyone would show much mercy on him.

Night of the Strangler

1981, 88 Minutes
Paragon
Director: Joy Houck
Cast: Micky Dolenz, Chuck Patterson, James Ralston
*****

Night of the Strangler is just the sort of film you won't find in a megachain video store. OK, it stinks, but it certainly is unusual. I mean, where else are you going to find ex-Monkees star Micky Dolenz in a slasher-style horror film?

Denise (Susan McCullough) returns to New Orleans from college with news for her two brothers: she's dropping out of school because she's pregnant and the father is black. The younger of the two brothers, Vance (Micky Dolenz) is supportive of Denise, but Dan (James Ralston), a racist jerk, has a fit. Soon after, the murders start—first Denise's boyfriend, then Denise, and so on.

More a murder mystery/melodrama than a true horror film, *Night of the Strangler* shouts its socially conscious theme in every scene. The cast is mostly terrible, though Dolenz manages to be somewhat less stiff than the rest, and Chuck Patterson acquits himself pretty well as a black priest who gets involved with the mystery. The sound is awful, the lighting and film stock sub-par.

The somewhat inventive murders will provide at least a spark of interest for bored viewers. Snakes and crossbows are employed, along with the usual pistols and big knives. Oddly enough, no one gets strangled. One person is drowned in a bathtub, but that's the closest we come to any mayhem vaguely related to the movie's title.

Dolenz's role in *Night of the Strangler* is a long, long way from his days as Corky, the star of the 50s television adventure series, *Circus Boy.* Fortunately, he was rescued from acting jobs like this by the Monkees' reunion tour in the mid-80s.

Next time we'll visit the realms of sword & sorcery, including dragons Disney-style and yet another in the fabled Deathstalker series.

Take A Byte

Fantasy Empires And Postponing The DARK SUN® Game

by Erlene Mooney

Top-down action and lots of combat dominate the D&D® computer game *Fantasy Empires.*

Assistant producer Rick White said the game, which he expects to be on the shelves in August, can be enjoyed by one to five players. White said he is confident about the release date, as the game is scheduled to be finished in July.

In *Fantasy Empires,* players control a central hero and armies. The computer provides a top-down view of the D&D game's known world, and the player can manipulate the armies and his hero to fight other forces.

"It's real graphically pleasing. You run around and beat on stuff," White said, adding the action is similar to the Gauntlet game.

White is delighted with the game's "engine," and hopes to use it on other games, possibly on one focusing on Menzoberranzan. A game such as that would also have politics thrown in, he said.

The D&D computer game is a combination of role playing and strategic conquest.

"We decided that there was a void to fill in the computer game industry and that it was time to combine the best elements of both genres—strategy and role playing. Thus, *Fantasy Empires* was born, a multi-player role playing game which takes place in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® world of Mystara.

White states that throughout the history of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, one of the more central characters has been the DUNGEON MASTER™. Traditionally, the DM™ has acted as a moderator, facilitator, and adjudicator of the game. The computer game's DM will respond differently to each player based on the hero's strengths, weaknesses, and actions.

In *Fantasy Empires*, the DM is the intermediary for all actions. He will give players advice throughout their various campaigns. He will reward characters with experience after the completion of campaigns, and he will monitor the actions and alignments of the characters.

White said players will begin with a first level character in a single kingdom. Throughout the various scenarios, players will build up their characters' experience and conquer more kingdoms to increase their income and military strength.

Players will have to balance 34 different troop types to achieve victory. White added the players also can participate in real-time battles pitting their heroes against monsters.

DARK SUN Game Delay

The much-awaited DARK SUN computer game that the POLYHEDRON® Newszine reported coming out in February or March is expected to be released in August.

White said "We're working on it very hard. The project turned out to be more involved than we thought. In fact, we revamped the team for the second DARK SUN computer game."

The first DARK SUN computer game got bogged down in the design stage because of the complex and detailed storyline and because of the sheer number of combats that were going into the game, White said. "Now we're focusing on combat and making sure it is interesting."

The sequel is projected to come out 10 months after the first game, he said. ❑

300 dpi Color Scan
80% c. JPG

Photoshop CS:
level
sharpen (selective)
despeckle

The Roving Eye

Visions of Eclipse May 21-23, Columbia, MO